John Byrne's
NEXTMEN
POWER
BOOK 5
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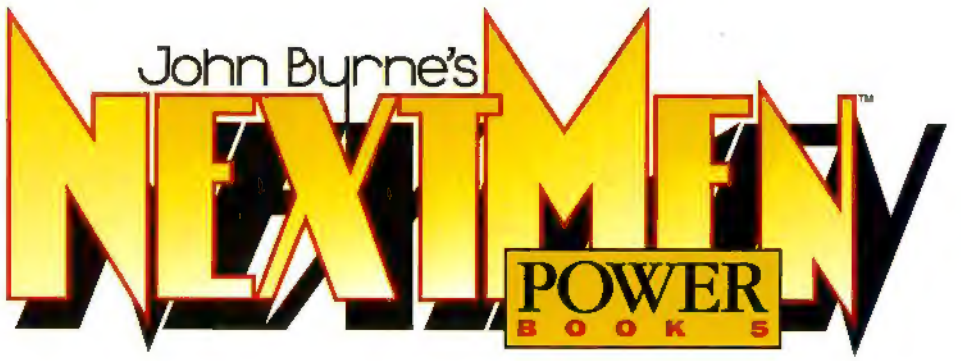
John Byrne's NEXTMEN™

POWER

BOOK 5



Story and art by John Byrne

Colors by Matt Webb
Cover painting by Gary Cody

Introduction by Tom Batiuk

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Dark Horse Comics®

INTRODUCTION

In order to write a proper introduction to *John Byrne's Next Men: Power*, I'm going to have to take you on a little comic-book safari. Let's return for a moment to the days before comics shops, subscription services, speculators, and comic-book companies on Wall Street . . . back to when comic books were primarily the domain of precocious twelve-year-olds who purchased them because they were . . . fun.

Now, I could go on a comic-book safari any day of the week, but Saturdays were best. This was mainly due to the fact that as a twelve-year-old, my access to the Big City was pretty much limited to bumming rides with my parents, and Saturday was when my family would journey to Akron, Ohio to visit our relatives. Often, the first stop on the safari would be Schield's IGA Foodliner to pick up a few staples for the grandparents . . . time enough to scoot in and peruse the skimpy comics spinner rack. But while the IGA rack was far from the best, its real asset lay in the fact that the comic books residing there were usually a month or more old, and if I was ever going to locate that issue of *Mystery in Space* that had somehow escaped me, this was the most likely place to find it.

From there, it was on to Akron where, from the moment we arrived at my grandmother's house on Brown Street, I'd begin lobbying to be cut free so I could continue the hunt. Once on my own, I'd head straight for the Rexall drugstore a block down the street. The Rexall comics section was invariably a chaotic mess, which meant that in the limited time allotted, I had to eyeball the cover of every single comic book in the store since I never knew what gem might be obscured behind those seemingly ubiquitous issues of *Richie Rich* and *Casper the Friendly Ghost*.

Having accomplished my objectives there, I was out the door and down two more blocks to that Holy of Holies, Readers' Corner Store, where, directly across from the soda fountain — at which, by the way, I probably had my last truly decent cherry Coke — there was an entire wall of periodicals. Here, hiding down in the shadows, under the top tier of magazines right behind the ancient cardboard sign that said: NO READING — THIS ISN'T A LIBRARY, was comic-book heaven. Not only did Readers' Corner Store have all the comic books that I saw everywhere else, it also had those comics that I never saw anywhere else! Simply by walking in the door, I could somehow sense the aura of that special issue of *Showcase* with the first appearance of the Atom waiting patiently for me to discover it. Suffice it to say that this was the happiest hunting ground for comic-book culture that ever existed on the face of this blue planet.

And the kind of comic books that I was looking for on these comic-book safaris was very special indeed. Even if I couldn't put it into words — although a glance at the letters columns in the books would prove that this wasn't a problem for most — I *just knew* . . . no, make that *just felt* when it was right. I could tell immediately when things were too contrived, too condescending, or too cute.

The people responsible for creating those books were well aware that if they hoped to extract coins from the tight little fists of twelve-year-old kids, they were going to have to be very clever indeed. They knew they were going to have to throw lightning bolts and create magic. And every now and then they succeeded in doing just that — by producing writing

and art that showed a respect for, and an understanding of, the genre. This also meant editing letters pages that respected the thoughts and opinions of a young and very demanding audience. It was a thin wire to walk. Too far in one direction, and they flirted with camp. Too far in the other, and they risked dulling the bravura sensibilities of the medium. The superhero genre is a tough one to get right, but when they got it right, I instinctively knew, and it produced a feeling quite unlike any other I'd ever known.

From Readers' Corner Store, my trophies from the hunt were carried back to my grandmother's house where I'd sit on the glider on her front porch and allow myself to drift away on incredible storytelling sojourns. At such moments, the world was a cool place, the future was full of wonder and promise, and my fate rested in my own hands.

So what does all this have to do with *John Byrne's Next Men: Power*? I thought you'd never ask.

I first came across this Byrne guy on a book called *Space: 1999*. I'll admit it was the art — more specifically the covers — that initially hooked me, but once I started paying closer attention, I began to realize that here was someone who knew how to have some fun with this medium. I'll admit right now that the titles of these stories have faded to some dim recesses in my memory — I have neither an encyclopedic mind nor a compulsive, get-a-life concern for details — but I do remember how the stories in question made me feel, and that's what we're talking about here. A brief quartet of personal highlights would have to include the riveting story from *Space: 1999* which revolved around the simplest of plots . . . a man desperately trying to traverse the few feet of airless space separating him from the life-sustaining safety of his ship. There was also that simply amazing little run of covers on *Wolverine*, and the classic attack on the Fantastic Four's Baxter Building as seen solely through the eyes of the intruder, and in Superman the most evil take on Lex Luthor I've ever encountered in "Metropolis 900 Mi." Okay, so I remembered one.

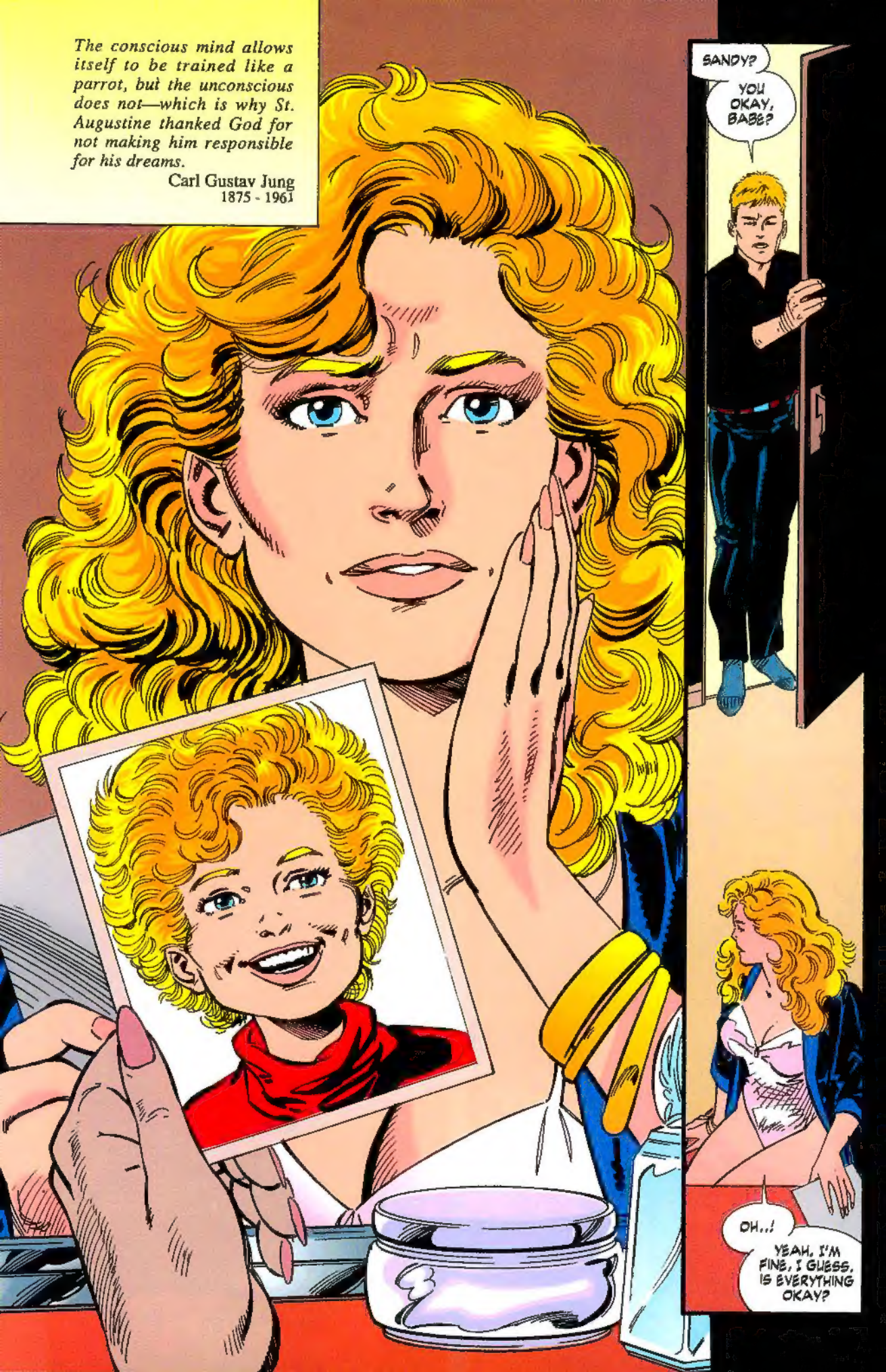
The point I'm trying to make here is that John Byrne knew how to get it right, and in *John Byrne's Next Men*, he continues to get it right. This includes a letters column that's as much fun to read as the rest of the magazine and which keeps growing bigger with each issue. I fully expect to one day see the *All Lettercol* issue, and there's not a scintilla of doubt in my mind that this thought hasn't already occurred to the puckish Mr. Byrne, being the imp that he is.

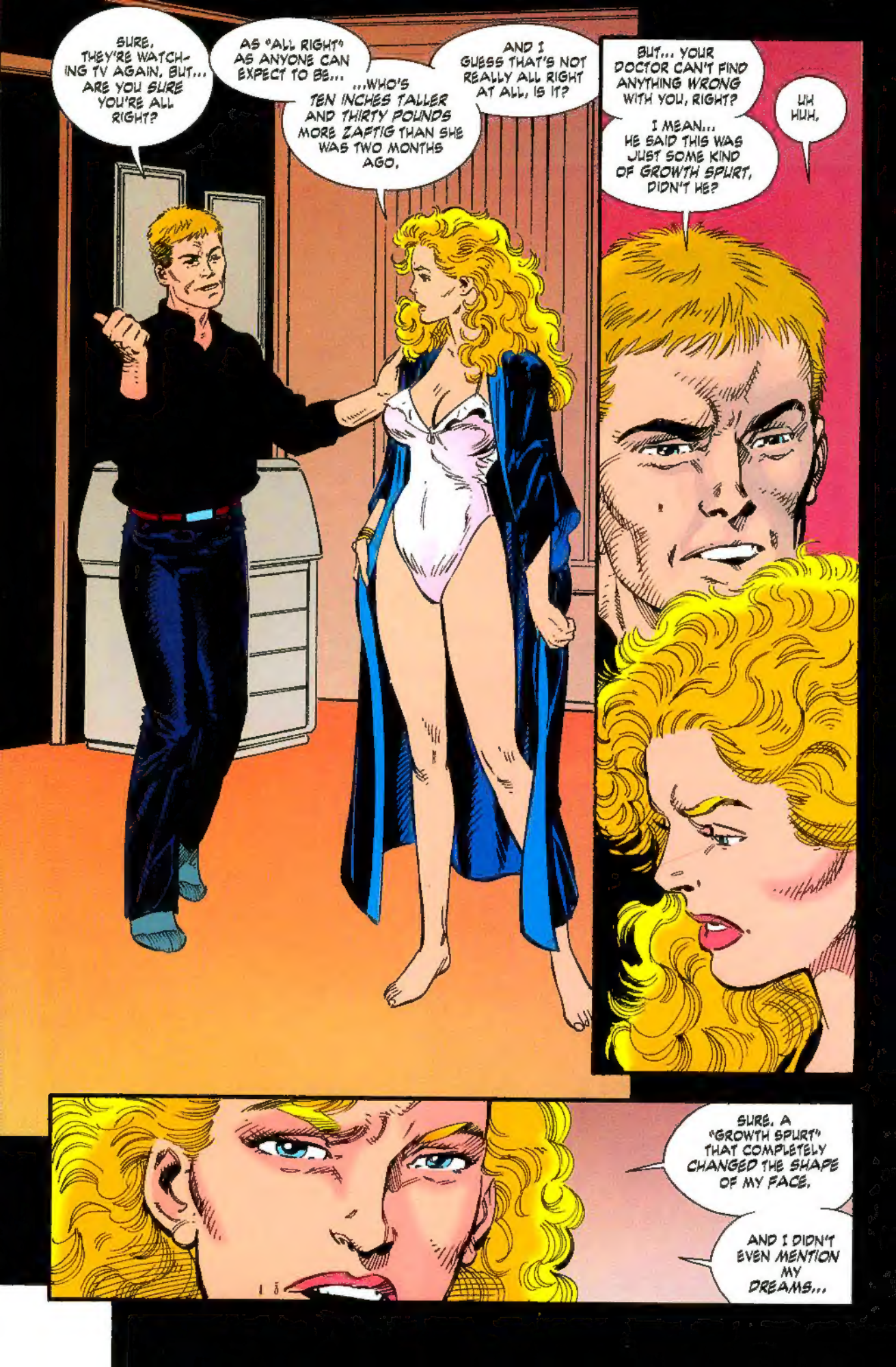
Which brings us at long last to *John Bryne's Next Men: Power*, one of the more entertaining slices out of this ongoing saga. I'm not going to fill you in on what's gone before. Buy the first four volumes and have the fun of finding out for yourself. What you'll find between these covers is John Byrne at his very best. Mind-bending time travel, unexpected plot twists, lampoons of the genre and industry — which you are permitted to do if you've shown that you like and respect it first — guest shots galore, including his truly, capped with the complete destruction of . . . Well, let's not spoil things. But beyond its dazzling artwork and nonstop action is writing that at times transcends the medium and achieves the real goal that all art ultimately strives for, which is to give some kind of insight into the human condition and, by doing so, to uplift and inspire in some way.

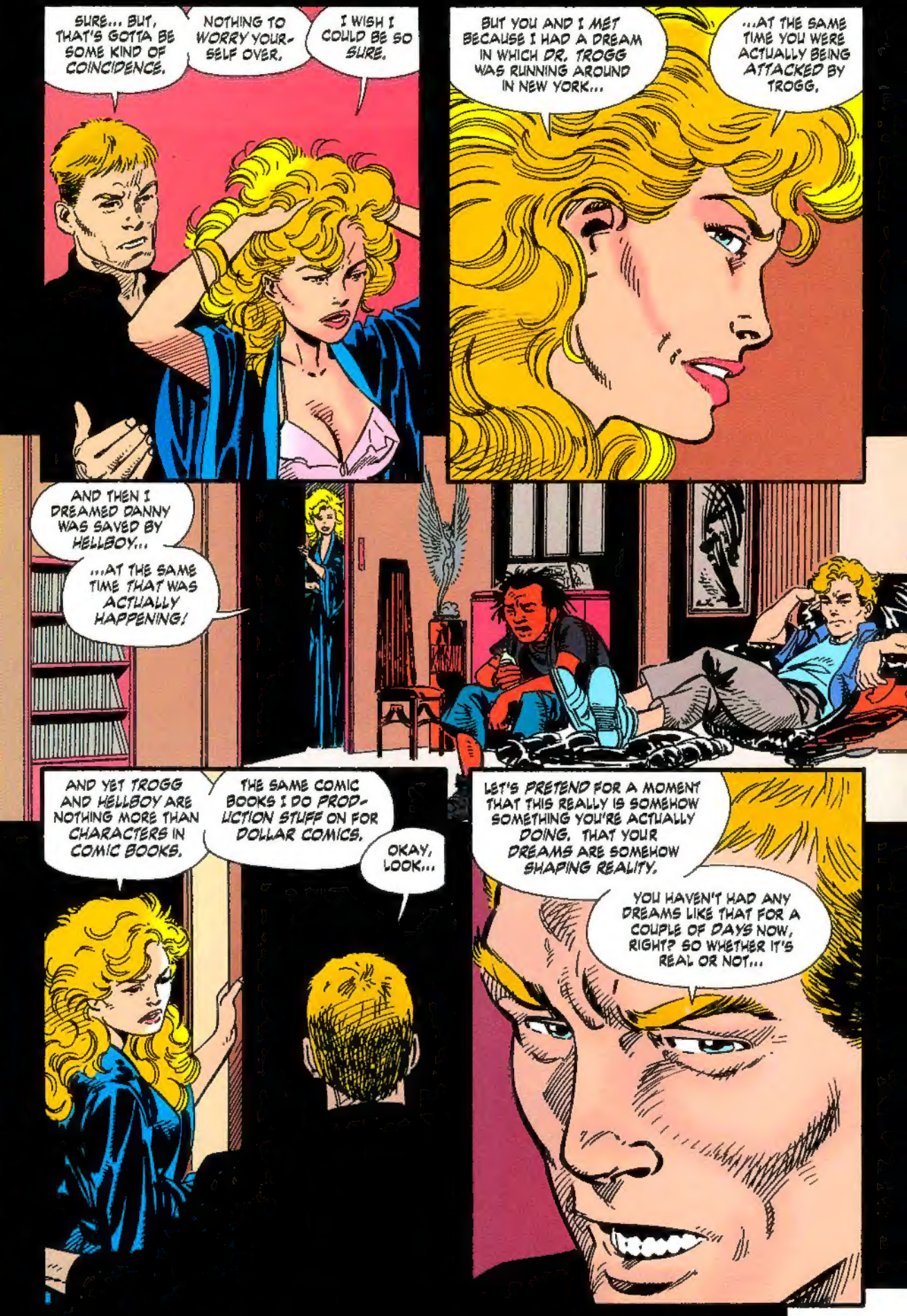
When Sandy Tolliver talks about "all the shit that everyone carries," she not only confirms that part of our nature but sets an example for dealing with it as well. Nice stuff.

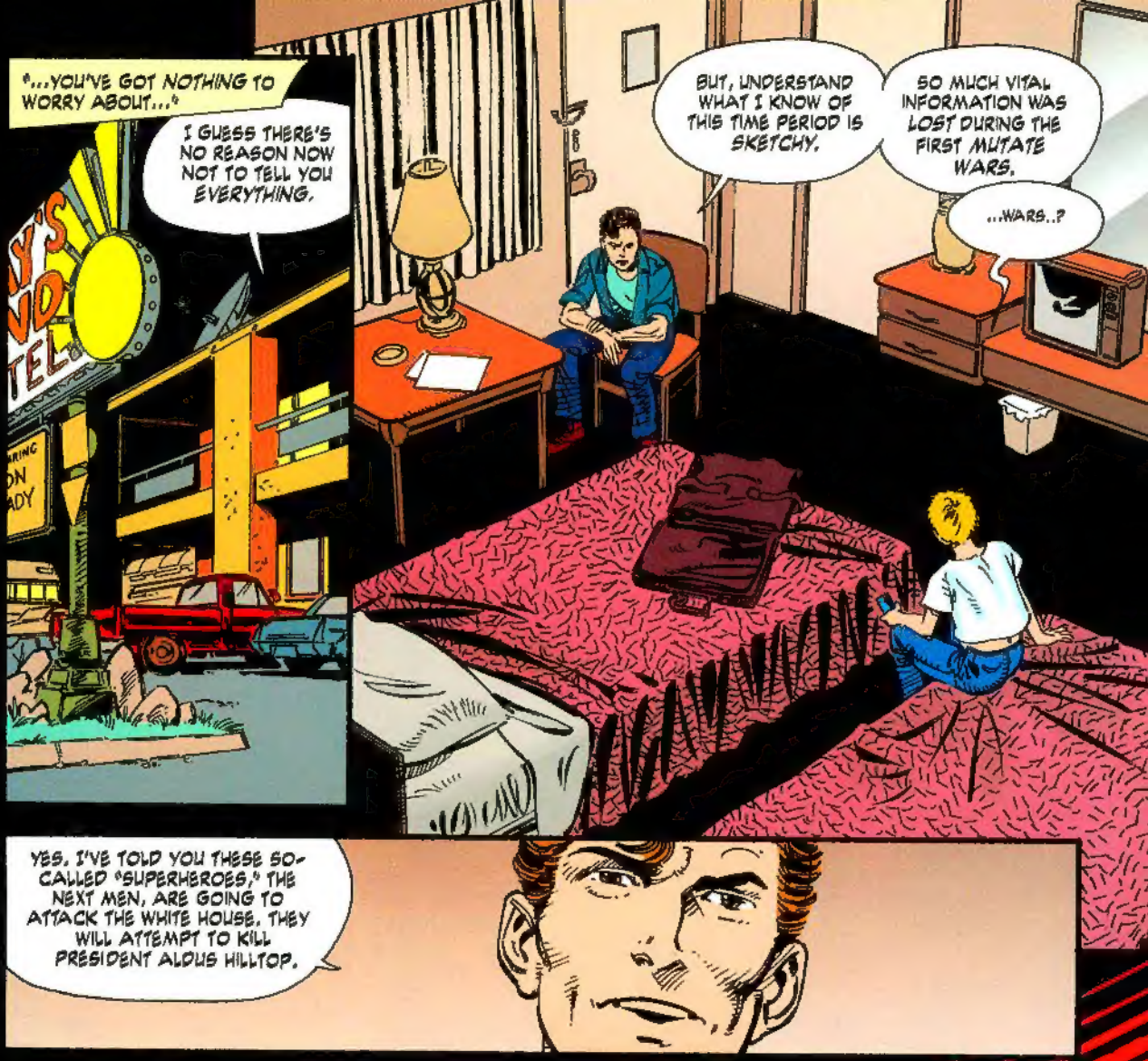
While the comic-book safari may be a thing of the past, the spirit of those magic books we sought lives. These days, *John Byrne's Next Men* is what I click on when I want to return to that glider on my grandmother's front porch where, for a brief time, I can again be reminded that the world is a cool place, the future is full of wonder and promise, and my fate rests in my own hands.

—Tom Batiuk


The conscious mind allows itself to be trained like a parrot, but the unconscious does not—which is why St. Augustine thanked God for not making him responsible for his dreams.
Carl Gustav Jung
1875 - 1961
SANDY?
YOU OKAY, BABE?
OH..!
YEAH, I'M FINE, I GUESS. IS EVERYTHING OKAY?


SURE, THEY'RE WATCHING TV AGAIN. BUT... ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT?
AS "ALL RIGHT" AS ANYONE CAN EXPECT TO BE...
...WHO'S TEN INCHES TALLER AND THIRTY POUNDS MORE ZAFTIG THAN SHE WAS TWO MONTHS AGO.
AND I GUESS THAT'S NOT REALLY ALL RIGHT AT ALL, IS IT?
BUT... YOUR DOCTOR CAN'T FIND ANYTHING WRONG WITH YOU, RIGHT?
I MEAN... HE SAID THIS WAS JUST SOME KIND OF GROWTH SPURT, DIDN'T HE?
UH HUH.
SURE. A "GROWTH SPURT" THAT COMPLETELY CHANGED THE SHAPE OF MY FACE.
AND I DIDN'T EVEN MENTION MY DREAMS...

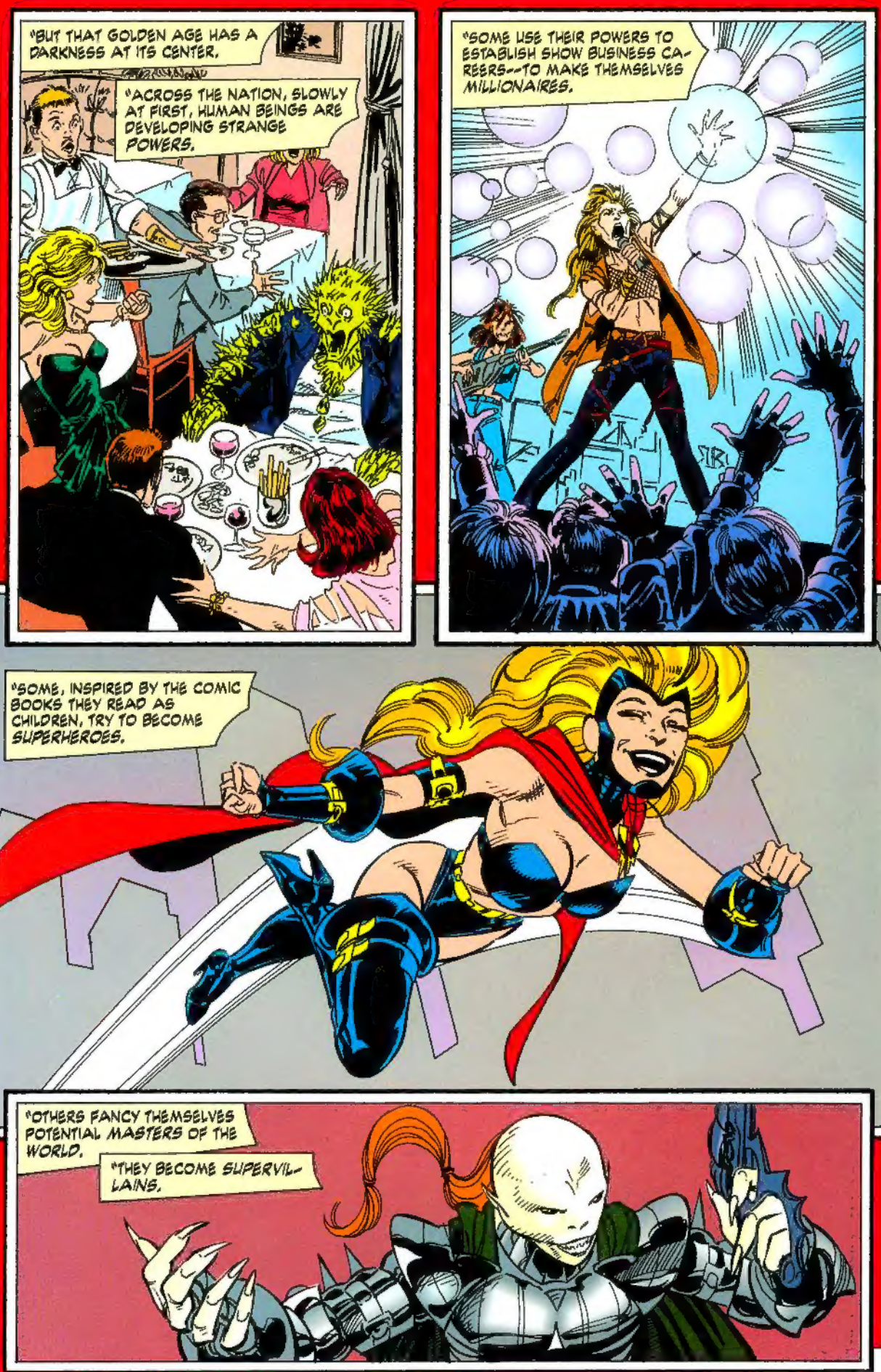

SURE... BUT, THAT'S GOTTA BE SOME KIND OF COINCIDENCE.
NOTHING TO WORRY YOURSELF OVER.
I WISH I COULD BE SO SURE.
BUT YOU AND I MET BECAUSE I HAD A DREAM IN WHICH DR. TROGG WAS RUNNING AROUND IN NEW YORK...
...AT THE SAME TIME YOU WERE ACTUALLY BEING ATTACKED BY TROGG.
AND THEN I DREAMED DANNY WAS SAVED BY HELLBOY...
...AT THE SAME TIME THAT WAS ACTUALLY HAPPENING!
AND YET TROGG AND HELLBOY ARE NOTHING MORE THAN CHARACTERS IN COMIC BOOKS.
THE SAME COMIC BOOKS I DO PRODUCTION STUFF ON FOR DOLLAR COMICS.
OKAY, LOOK...
LET'S PRETEND FOR A MOMENT THAT THIS REALLY IS SOMEHOW SOMETHING YOU'RE ACTUALLY DOING. THAT YOUR DREAMS ARE SOMEHOW SHAPING REALITY.
YOU HAVEN'T HAD ANY DREAMS LIKE THAT FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS NOW, RIGHT? SO WHETHER IT'S REAL OR NOT...

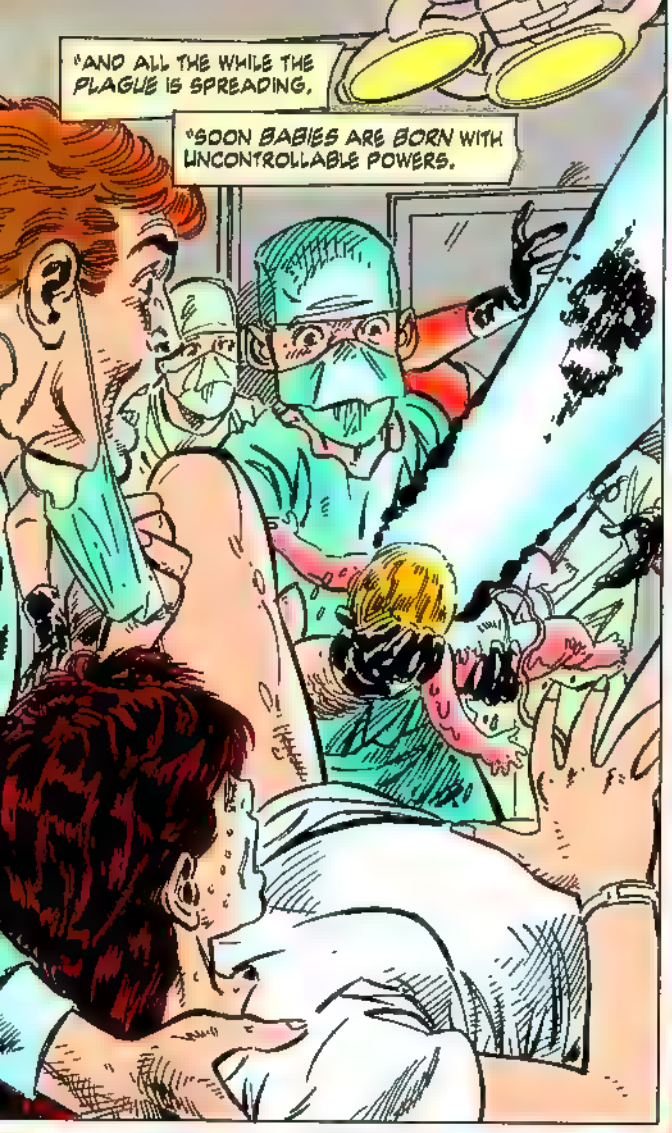

"...YOU'VE GOT NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT..."
I GUESS THERE'S NO REASON NOW NOT TO TELL YOU EVERYTHING.
BUT, UNDERSTAND WHAT I KNOW OF THIS TIME PERIOD IS SKETCHY.
SO MUCH VITAL INFORMATION WAS LOST DURING THE FIRST MUTATE WARS.
...WARS..?

YES. I'VE TOLD YOU THESE SO-CALLED "SUPERHEROES," THE NEXT MEN, ARE GOING TO ATTACK THE WHITE HOUSE. THEY WILL ATTEMPT TO KILL PRESIDENT ALDUS HILLTOP.

"HE WILL SURVIVE, AND GO ON TO BECOME THE GREATEST PRESIDENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY.
"IN FACT THE CONSTITUTION WAS--WILL BE--AMENDED TO PERMIT HIM TO BECOME PRESIDENT FOR LIFE.

"AND WITH THE MEDICAL ADVANCES THAT COME IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS, HE LIVES TO BE WELL OVER ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF AGE.
"DURING THAT TIME AMERICA EXPERIENCES WHAT CAN ONLY BE CALLED A GOLDEN AGE.


"BUT THAT GOLDEN AGE HAS A DARKNESS AT ITS CENTER.
"ACROSS THE NATION, SLOWLY AT FIRST, HUMAN BEINGS ARE DEVELOPING STRANGE POWERS.
"SOME USE THEIR POWERS TO ESTABLISH SHOW BUSINESS CAREERS--TO MAKE THEMSELVES MILLIONAIRES.
"SOME, INSPIRED BY THE COMIC BOOKS THEY READ AS CHILDREN, TRY TO BECOME SUPERHEROES.
"OTHERS FANCY THEMSELVES POTENTIAL MASTERS OF THE WORLD.
"THEY BECOME SUPERVILLAINS.


"AND ALL THE WHILE THE PLAGUE IS SPREADING,
"SOON BABIES ARE BORN WITH UNCONTROLLABLE POWERS.

"BY 2002 SCIENTISTS HAVE ISOLATED THE CAUSE--THE TRIGGER GENE, CAUSE OF ALL HUMAN EVOLUTION...
"...IS BEING ARTIFICIALLY STIMULATED BY SEXUAL CONTACT WITH THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN 'TRIGGERED.'

"THAT DISCOVERY DOES LITTLE GOOD, HOWEVER. THE MORE POWERFUL MUTATES HAVE ALREADY ESTABLISHED IMPENETRABLE CITY STATES, VAST KINGDOMS.

"IN 2009, AS ITS LAST OFFICIAL ACT, THE UNITED NATIONS REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE THESE MUTATE STATES.
ANADA
SOUTH AFRICA

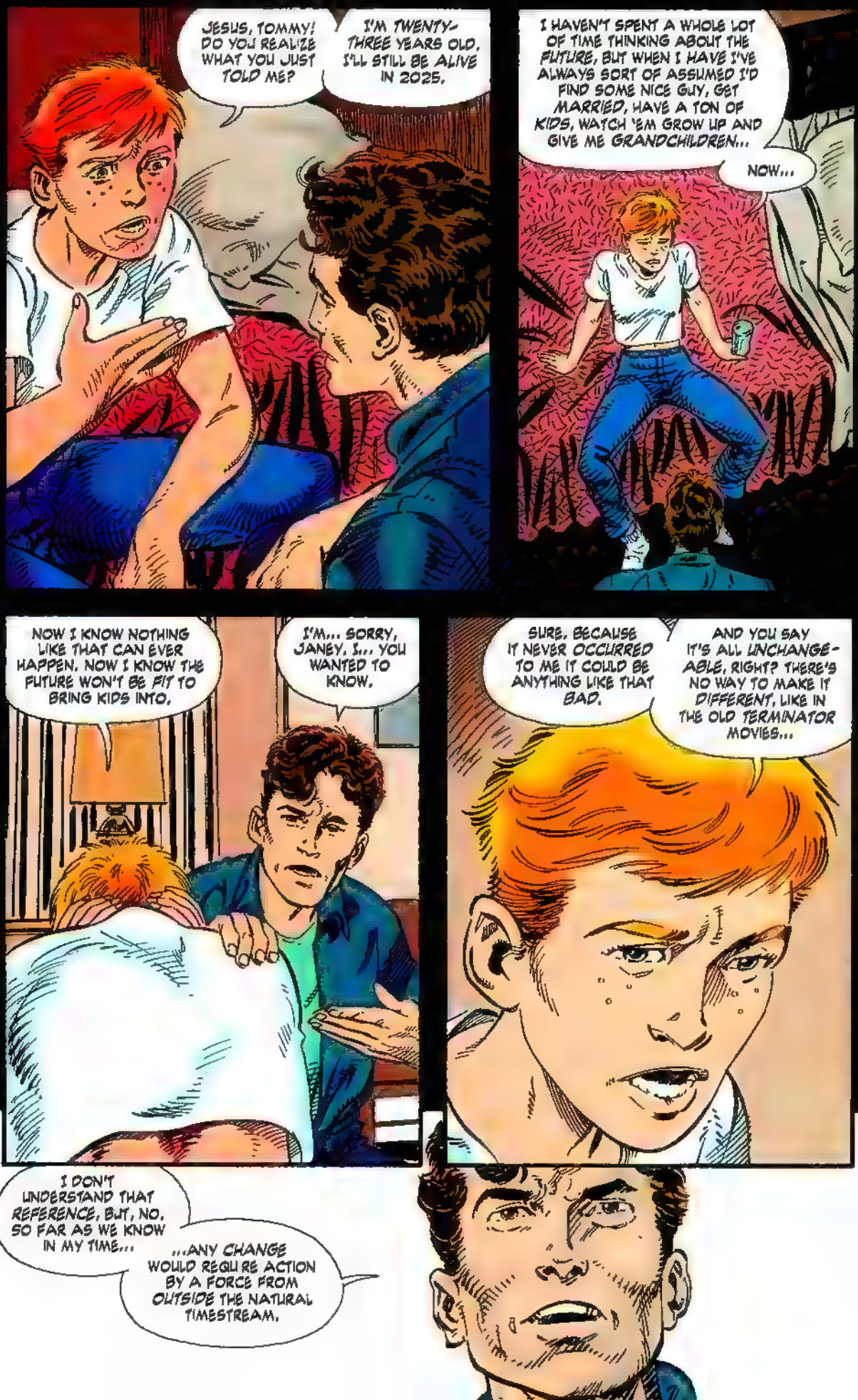
"THE UNITED NATIONS IS DESTROYED.

"SO BEGINS THE SO-CALLED SIX-THOUSAND-DAY WAR.
"FROM 2009 TO 2025, THE HUMAN RACE IS PLUNGED INTO THE MOST DESPERATE SITUATION IT HAS EVER FACED.

"HUMAN SURVIVAL ITSELF SEEMS UNLIKELY.

"THEN, IN 2025, SATHANAS REVEALS HIMSELF.

"WE DON'T KNOW HOW LONG HE'D BEEN IN EXISTENCE, WHEN OR HOW HE WAS TRIGGERED.
"WE KNOW ONLY THAT HE WAS THE MOST DANGEROUS MUTATE OF THEM ALL...
"...AND HE HAD BEEN BEHIND ALL THE MUTATE UNREST FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.
"AND THAT IN 2112 HE USED A MASSIVE, FOCUSED EXPLOSION TO HURL HIMSELF AND SOME EIGHTY OF HIS FOLLOWERS...
...BACK TO THIS CENTURY. I WAS SENT AFTER HIM IN MUCH THE SAME...
JANEY..?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
NO.


JESUS, TOMMY! DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU JUST TOLD ME?
I'M TWENTY-THREE YEARS OLD. I'LL STILL BE ALIVE IN 2025.
I HAVEN'T SPENT A WHOLE LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE, BUT WHEN I HAVE I'VE ALWAYS SORT OF ASSUMED I'D FIND SOME NICE GUY, GET MARRIED, HAVE A TON OF KIDS, WATCH 'EM GROW UP AND GIVE ME GRANDCHILDREN...
NOW...
NOW I KNOW NOTHING LIKE THAT CAN EVER HAPPEN. NOW I KNOW THE FUTURE WON'T BE FIT TO BRING KIDS INTO.
I'M... SORRY, JANEY. I... YOU WANTED TO KNOW.
SURE. BECAUSE IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME IT COULD BE ANYTHING LIKE THAT BAD.
AND YOU SAY IT'S ALL UNCHANGEABLE, RIGHT? THERE'S NO WAY TO MAKE IT DIFFERENT, LIKE IN THE OLD TERMINATOR MOVIES...
I DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT REFERENCE, BUT, NO. SO FAR AS WE KNOW IN MY TIME...
...ANY CHANGE WOULD REQUIRE ACTION BY A FORCE FROM OUTSIDE THE NATURAL TIMESTREAM.

"WHICH DOESN'T MEAN I'M NOT GOING TO *TRY*."
THERE. I THINK THAT'S REMOVED ANY *SUPERFLUOUS* CIRCUITRY.
NATHAN...
BETH..?
NATHAN... I... I DON'T KNOW QUITE HOW TO SAY THIS. A PIECE OF ME WANTS TO *APOLOGIZE* FOR HOW I'VE BEEN BEHAVING...
BUT A *BIGGER* PIECE KNOWS IT'S NOT ME WHO'S BEEN IN THE WRONG.
AFTER WHAT HAPPENED IN RUSSIA... BETWEEN YOU AND *JAZZ*...
WE... DON'T HAVE TO GET INTO THIS NOW, BETH.
I KNOW. BUT... AFTER EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED IN THE LAST FEW HOURS...
NATHAN, THERE ARE THINGS THAT NEED TO BE *SAID*, AND I DON'T WANT TO RISK LOSING THE CHANCE TO SAY THEM.
BACK IN THE GREENERY--I KNOW NONE OF THAT WAS *REAL*, NOT IN THE WAY THIS WORLD IS REAL, ANYWAY--BUT OUR *FEELINGS*... THEY WERE REAL, WEREN'T THEY?
YOU AND I NEVER ACTUALLY *SAID* ANYTHING, NEVER REALLY PUT IT INTO WORDS, BUT... WE HAD AN *UNDERSTANDING*.

YES. AND WHEN I DANCED WITH JAZZ--WHEN I HAD SEX WITH HER--I BETRAYED THAT UNDERSTANDING.
AND I'M SORRY, BETHANY. YOU KNOW JASMINE WAS NEVER ANYTHING TO ME BUT A FRIEND.
AND IF WE HADN'T BOTH THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO DIE, I'M SURE NOTHING WOULD HAVE HAPPENED BETWEEN US...
LOOK AT HER!
SHE-DEMON, I THINK SHE'S WHITER'N YOU!
WHO..??
IT'S LIKE TROGG SAID, MANDRILLER. PEOPLE HERE DON'T KNOW US!
BUT THEY'RE GONNA LEARN IN A HURRY!
NATHAN!

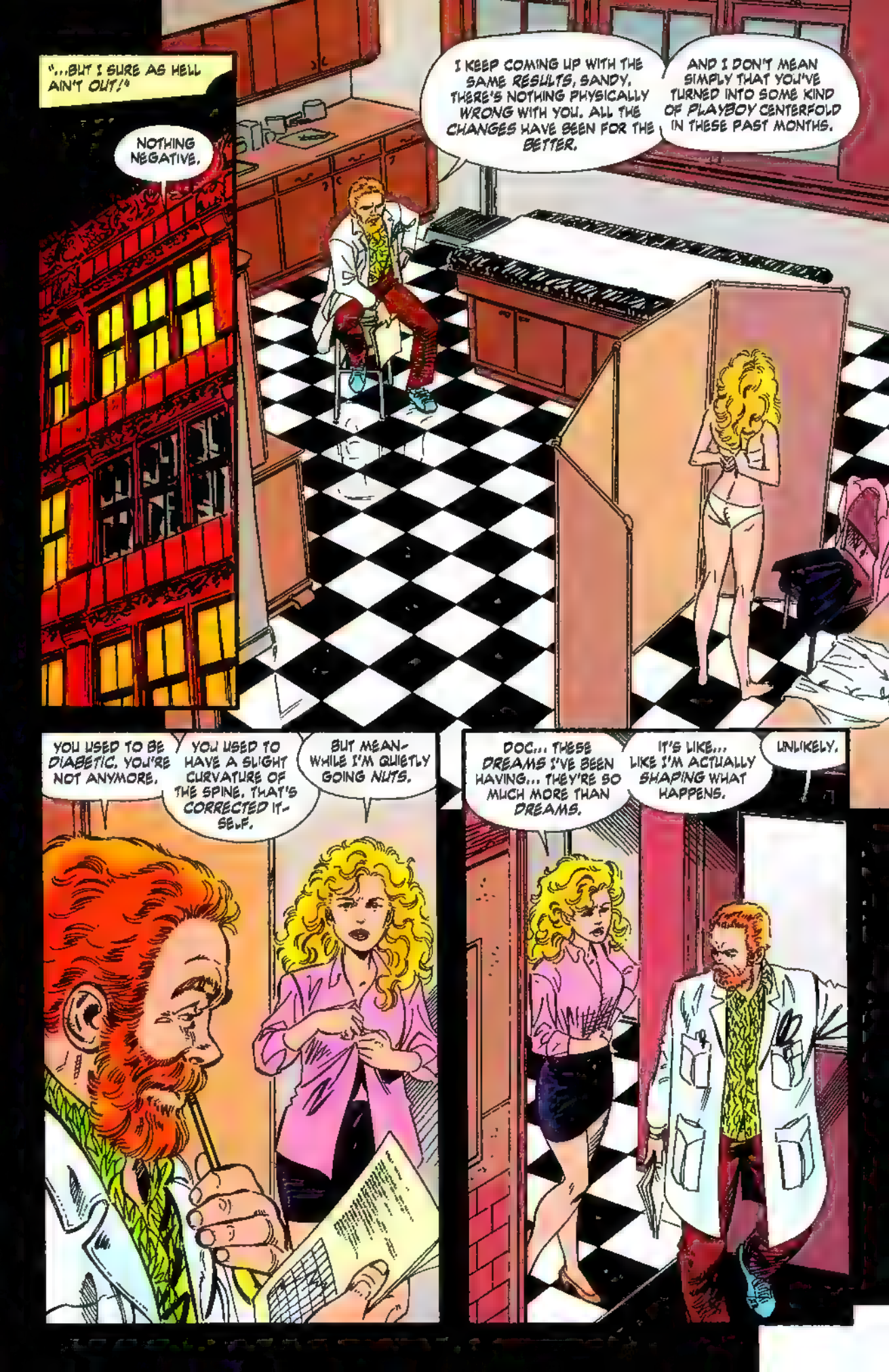
KEEP AWAY!
BACK OFF, SWEET STUFF. I MAY BE CALLED MANDRILLER...
...BUT I CAN CARVE YOU AS QUICK AS YOUR BOYFRIEND.
I DON'T THINK SO.
HEY! LEGGO MY DRILL!
OR I'LL MAKE YOU LET GO!
OH!!
BETH! DID HE... HURT YOU..??
NO. JUST STARTLED ME WHEN HE INCREASED THE SPEED OF HIS DRILLS.

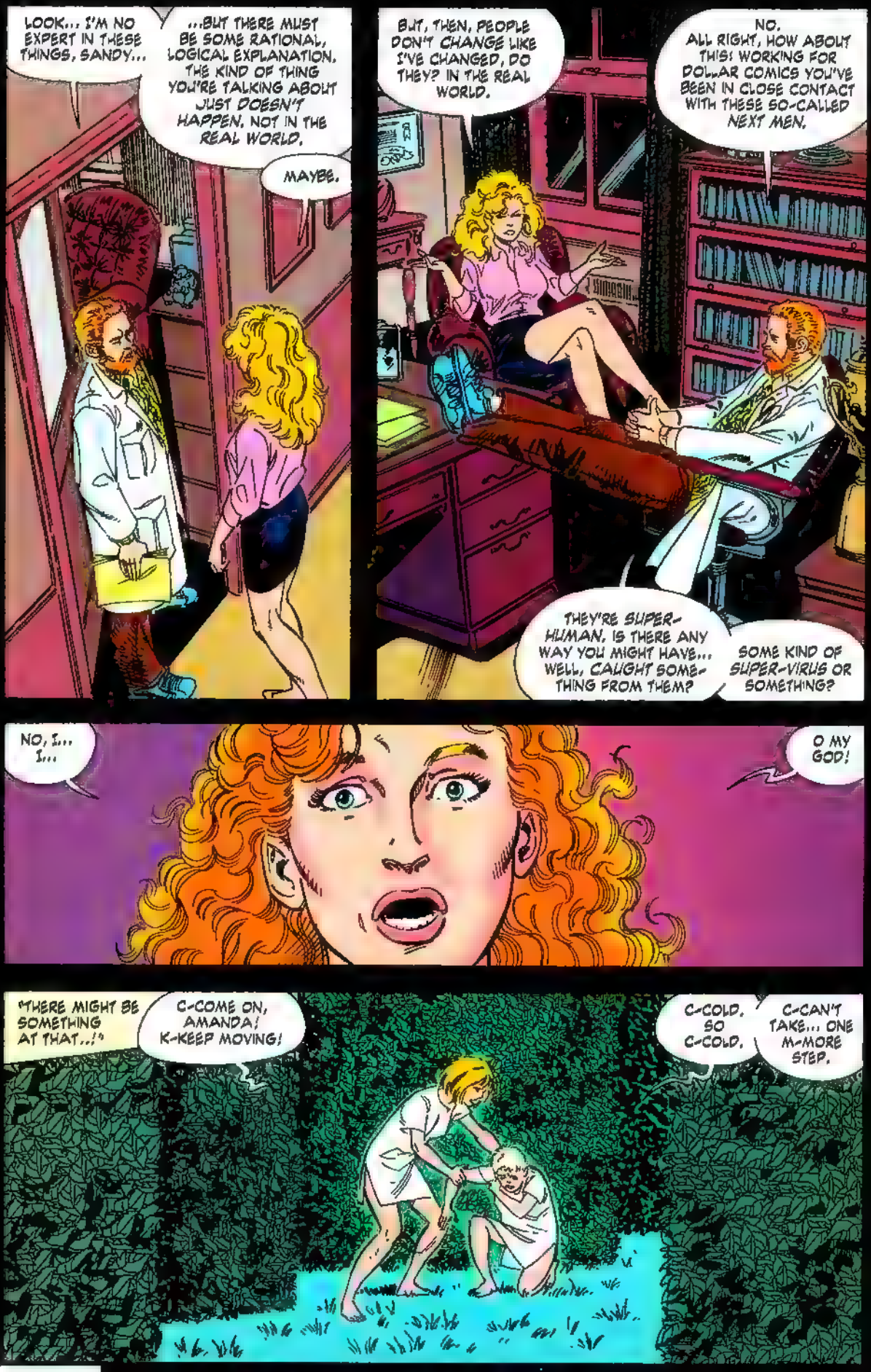
NOTHING HURTS ME.
AH-GH!!
SHE-DEMON! DON'T JUST SIT THERE ON YOUR ALABASTER BUTT!
DO SOME-THING!
LIKE WHAT?
TROGG SAID THERE WERE NO PEOPLE WITH SUPER-POWERS IN THIS WORLD.
HE SAID IT WOULD BE EASY HERE!
SO HE'S WRONG! IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S THE FIRST TIME.
WE'VE GOTTA LAM OUTTA...
DRILLER..? WHAT'S WRONG?
DUNNO. JUST... ALL OF A SUDDEN... FEEL KIND OF... HOLLOW...
DRILLER..!
"SANDY..?"

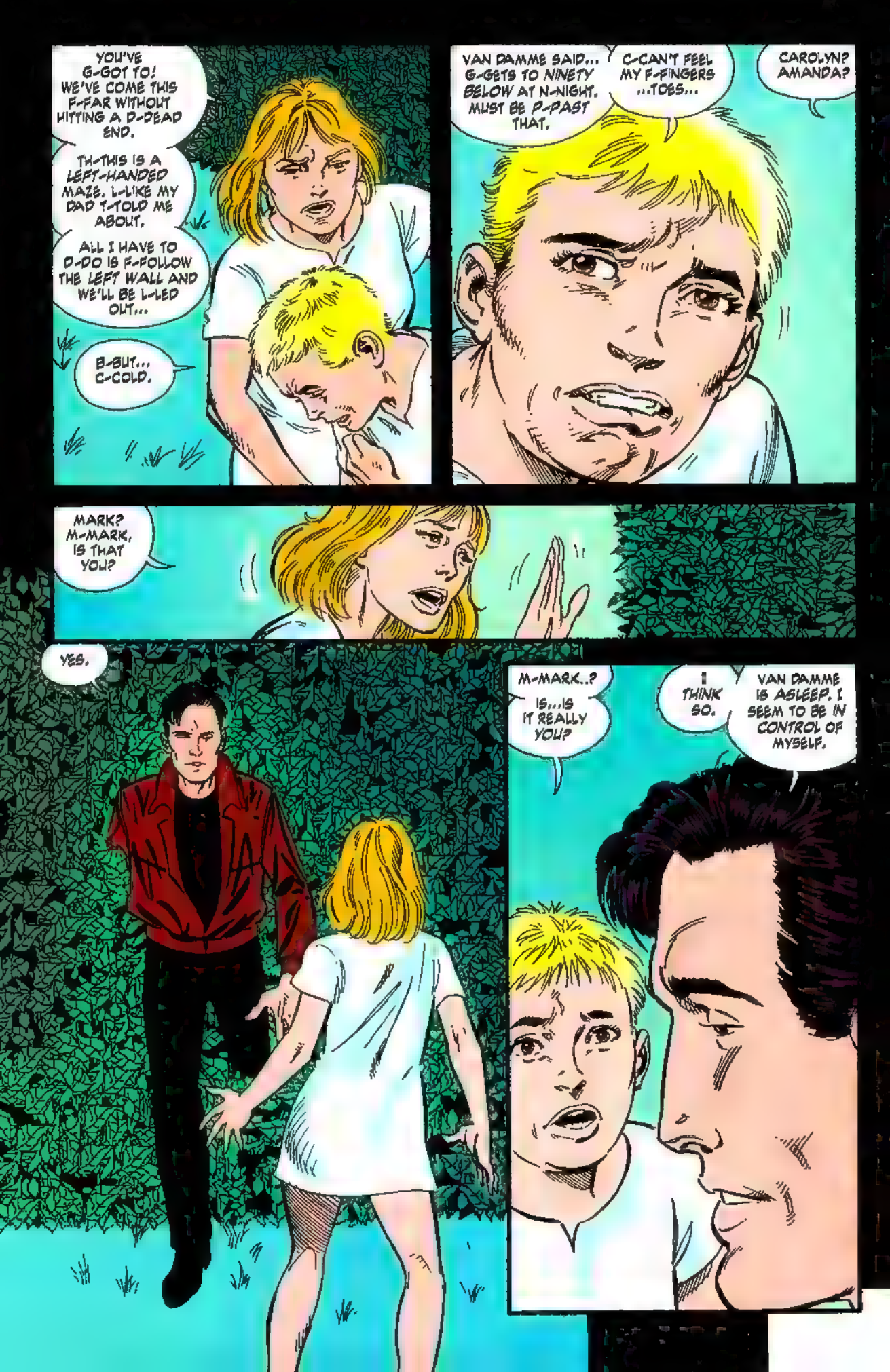
SANDY?
OH... DANNY.
WHAT... WHAT HAPPENED ..?
YOU SEEMED TO SORT OF... GO AWAY FOR A WHILE THERE. LIKE YOU WERE ASLEEP...
...EXCEPT YOU WEREN'T ASLEEP.
OH, GOD! IT WAS... IT WAS LIKE ONE OF MY DREAMS, ONLY... ONLY I WASN'T CONTROLLING WHAT HAPPENED.
IT WAS LIKE... THERE WAS SOME-ONE ELSE IN CONTROL.
"SOMEONE ELSE INSIDE MY MIND!"
LISSEN, MAN, I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER YOU THINK YOU CAN KEEP ME HERE...

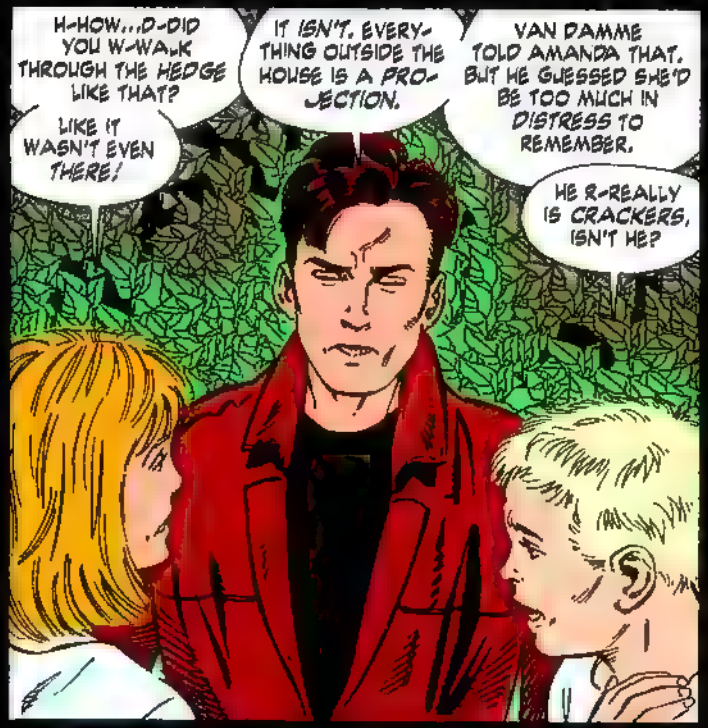
I WILL KEEP YOU UNTIL YOU ARE OF NO FURTHER USE TO ME.
PRAY THAT WILL NOT BE FOR A LONG TIME.
NO FAT CHICKS
NOW, DISTURB ME NO FURTHER. I HAVE LOST FOCUS ON THE DIMENSIONAL NEXUS. MANDRILLER AND THE SHE-DEMON HAVE SLIPPED BACK TO OUR OWN REALITY.
MY OWN CONTINUED PRESENCE HERE I AM ABLE TO MAINTAIN ONLY BY THE SHEER FORCE OF MY IMMEASURABLE WILL.
BUT SOON I MUST CONFRONT THE MAN YOU TELL ME IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS.
"THIS MAN CALLED BEN HOROWITZ..."
JUST RELAX, BEN. YOU'VE RISEN ABOVE GREATER OBSTACLES IN THE PAST.
HAVE I..?

FUNNY, I DON'T QUITE REMEMBER THAT, RALPHIE.
WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME I WAS ABOUT TO GET TOSSED IN THE SLAMMER FOR THE REST OF MY MISERABLE LIFE?
WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME I WAS ON THE VERGE OF LOSING MY JOB, MY HOME, MY WHOLE BLASTED REPUTATION? WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME PEOPLE WERE SAYING "BEN HOROWITZ, HE'S REALLY GONE OFF THE DEEP END, THIS TIME! HE'S REALLY LOST IT!"
HOW ABOUT WHEN YOU OFFERED OLD MAN CORMAN ONE DOLLAR FOR THE FAILED AND BANKRUPT COMIC-BOOK COMPANY YOU'D WORKED FOR ALL YOUR ADULT LIFE?
HOW ABOUT WHEN YOU WENT HEAD TO HEAD WITH MARVEL AND DC AND ALL THE OTHERS AND MADE A GO OF SOMETHING THE WHOLE WORLD SAID WAS DOOMED?
YEAH... I DID DO THAT, DIDN'T I..?
OKAY, RALPHIE! ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH AN' ALL THAT WHOOEY!
I MAY BE DOWN...

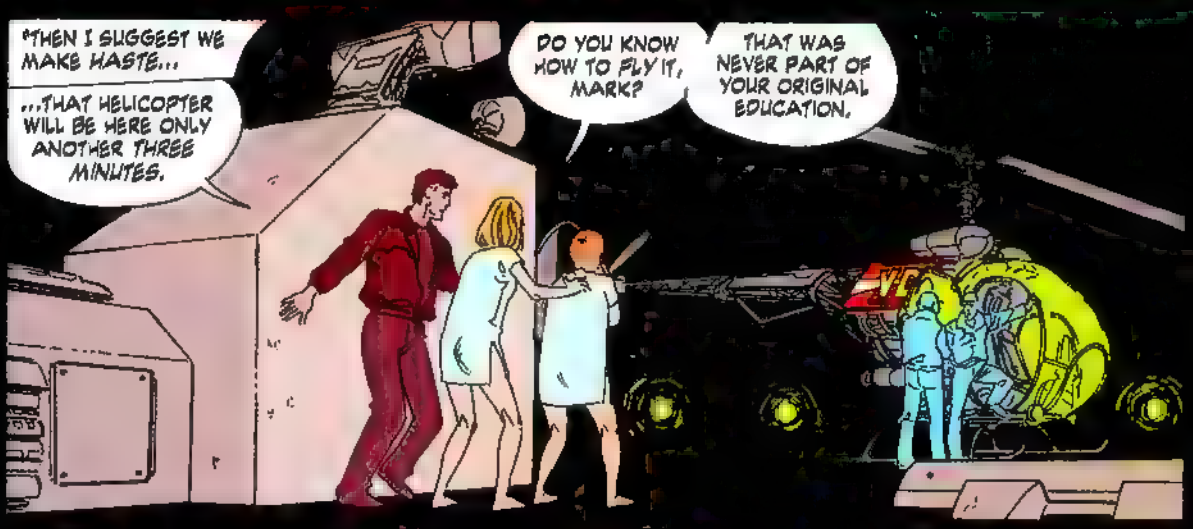

"...BUT I SURE AS HELL AIN'T OUT!"
NOTHING NEGATIVE.
I KEEP COMING UP WITH THE SAME RESULTS, SANDY. THERE'S NOTHING PHYSICALLY WRONG WITH YOU. ALL THE CHANGES HAVE BEEN FOR THE BETTER.
AND I DON'T MEAN SIMPLY THAT YOU'VE TURNED INTO SOME KIND OF PLAYBOY CENTERFOLD IN THESE PAST MONTHS.
YOU USED TO BE DIABETIC. YOU'RE NOT ANYMORE.
YOU USED TO HAVE A SLIGHT CURVATURE OF THE SPINE. THAT'S CORRECTED ITSELF.
BUT MEANWHILE I'M QUIETLY GOING NUTS.
DOC... THESE DREAMS I'VE BEEN HAVING... THEY'RE SO MUCH MORE THAN DREAMS.
IT'S LIKE... LIKE I'M ACTUALLY SHAPING WHAT HAPPENS.
UNLIKELY.


LOOK... I'M NO EXPERT IN THESE THINGS, SANDY...
...BUT THERE MUST BE SOME RATIONAL, LOGICAL EXPLANATION. THE KIND OF THING YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT JUST DOESN'T HAPPEN. NOT IN THE REAL WORLD.
MAYBE.
BUT, THEN, PEOPLE DON'T CHANGE LIKE I'VE CHANGED, DO THEY? IN THE REAL WORLD.
NO. ALL RIGHT, HOW ABOUT THIS: WORKING FOR DOLLAR COMICS YOU'VE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THESE SO-CALLED NEXT MEN.
THEY'RE SUPER-HUMAN. IS THERE ANY WAY YOU MIGHT HAVE... WELL, CAUGHT SOMETHING FROM THEM?
SOME KIND OF SUPER-VIRUS OR SOMETHING?
NO, I... I...
O MY GOD!
"THERE MIGHT BE SOMETHING AT THAT..!"
C-COME ON, AMANDA! K-KEEP MOVING!
C-COLD. SO C-COLD.
C-CAN'T TAKE... ONE M-MORE STEP.

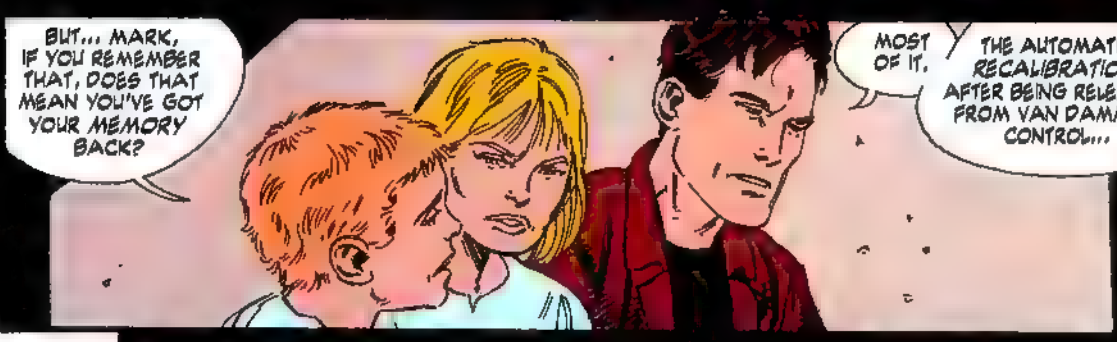

YOU'VE G-GOT TO! WE'VE COME THIS F-FAR WITHOUT HITTING A D-DEAD END.
TH-THIS IS A LEFT-HANDED MAZE. L-LIKE MY DAD T-TOLD ME ABOUT.
ALL I HAVE TO D-DO IS F-FOLLOW THE LEFT WALL AND WE'LL BE L-LED OUT...
B-BUT... C-COLD.
VAN DAMME SAID... G-GETS TO NINETY BELOW AT N-NIGHT. MUST BE P-PAST THAT.
C-CAN'T FEEL MY F-FINGERS ...TOES...
CAROLYN? AMANDA?
MARK? M-MARK, IS THAT YOU?
YES.
M-MARK..? IS...IS IT REALLY YOU?
I THINK SO.
VAN DAMME IS ASLEEP. I SEEM TO BE IN CONTROL OF MYSELF.


H-HOW...D-DID YOU W-WALK THROUGH THE HEDGE LIKE THAT?
LIKE IT WASN'T EVEN THERE!
IT ISN'T. EVERYTHING OUTSIDE THE HOUSE IS A PROJECTION.
VAN DAMME TOLD AMANDA THAT. BUT HE GUESSED SHE'D BE TOO MUCH IN DISTRESS TO REMEMBER.
HE R-REALLY IS CRACKERS, ISN'T HE?

DO YOU THINK THE TWO OF YOU CAN TRAVEL?
I-IF IT M-MEANS GETTING THE HELL AWAY F-FROM HERE, YOU BET!


"THEN I SUGGEST WE MAKE HASTE...
...THAT HELICOPTER WILL BE HERE ONLY ANOTHER THREE MINUTES.
DO YOU KNOW HOW TO FLY IT, MARK?
THAT WAS NEVER PART OF YOUR ORIGINAL EDUCATION.

NO, IT WASN'T.
BUT I HAVE LEARNED QUITE A LOT SINCE THEN. I CAN PILOT THAT AIRCRAFT...
...PROVIDED I AM NOT REQUIRED TO DO ANYTHING ...FANCY.


BUT... MARK, IF YOU REMEMBER THAT, DOES THAT MEAN YOU'VE GOT YOUR MEMORY BACK?
MOST OF IT.
THE AUTOMATIC RECALIBRATION AFTER BEING RELEASED FROM VAN DAMME'S CONTROL...

"...SEEMS TO HAVE RESTORED MUCH OF MY PAST TO ME."

LISTEN! ALARMS!
FOR ONE THING, CAROLYN...
NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, SURELY. WHAT CAN A BUNCH OF BLIND PEOPLE DO TO STOP US?
"...THEY CAN ACTIVATE THE ROBOT DEFENSE PERIMETER..."
VD
"NOW, LOOK...

I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF BULL YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO DUMP ON THOSE OTHER REPORTERS, BUT MS. WOJCIECHOWSKI AND I WERE DOWN THERE, IN THE SUBWAY TUNNELS.
AND THERE WAS NO NEED TO LET LOOSE WITH THE KIND OF FIREPOWER YOU DID.
IGN7
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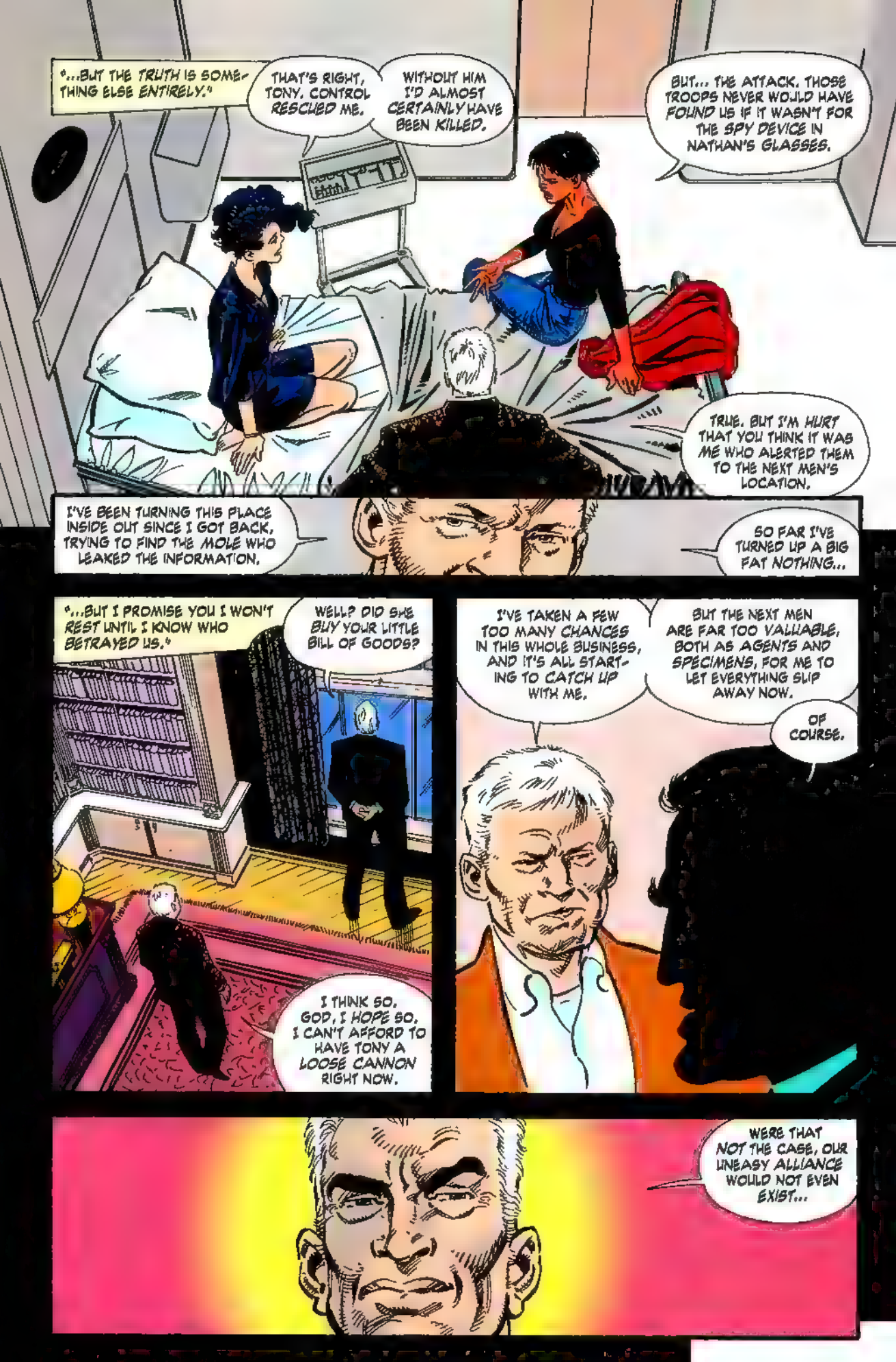
THOSE WERE MOSTLY INNOCENT PEOPLE DOWN THERE! WOMEN AND CHILDREN.
"MOSTLY."
AND WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS, MISS? WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT MEN?

WHAT ABOUT THE CONVICTED MASS MURDERERS THOSE SO-CALLED "INNOCENT PEOPLE" HAD TAKEN IN?
WHAT ABOUT THEM?
THE TERRORISTS THEY WERE HIDING FROM DUE PROCESS OF THE LAW?

YOU MAY CALL IT "DUE PROCESS," COLONEL, BUT MR. STONE AND I HAVE BEEN WITH THOSE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR OVER A WEEK NOW.
AND IF I LEARNED NOTHING ELSE IN THAT TIME, I LEARNED THERE WAS A LOT MORE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THAT BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH STATION THAN CAME OUT AT THE TRIAL.
FOR ONE THING...

"...I LEARNED THAT THE NEXT MEN HAVE BEEN OPERATING AS GOVERNMENT AGENTS!"
WHERE IS HE?
WHERE'S DUCUMMEN? WHERE'S CONTROL?
AGENT MURCHESON! I... I DON'T KNOW! I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM ALL DAY.
WELL, HE'S HERE SOMEWHERE.
"AND HE CAN'T HIDE FROM ME FOREVER!"
I SUPPOSE NOT.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO CONFRONT HER?

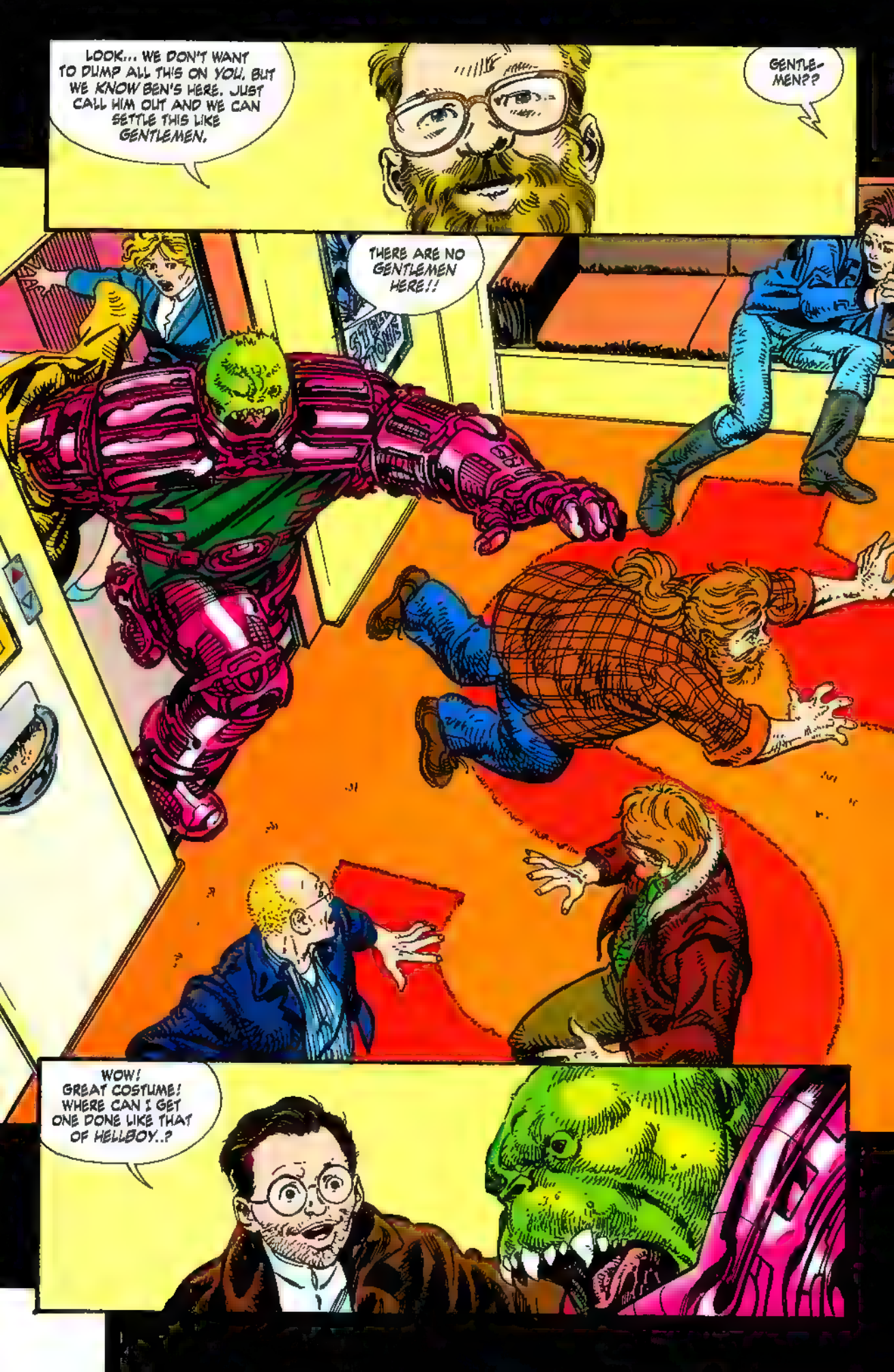
I HAVE TO. EVERYTHING IS COMING UNRAVELED.
I HAVE TO DEFLECT TONY BEFORE SHE WRECKS EVERYTHING.
BUT... BE CAREFUL, DUCUMMEN.
YOU TRAINED MURCHESON ESPECIALLY WELL.
"BE WARY THAT SUCCESS DOES NOT NOW CAUSE YOUR DOWNFALL."
CONTROL! SHOW YOURSELF, YOU GODDAM SONOVABITCH!
I'M RIGHT HERE, TONY. AND I HARDLY THINK I DESERVE THAT KIND OF ABUSE.
ABUSE? YOU DON'T KNOW THE MEANING OF THE WORD.
YOU SOLD US OUT! ME! THOSE KIDS!
WHY?? GODDAMMIT, WILLIS!
WHY??
I HAVEN'T SOLD ANYONE OUT, TONY. I KNOW WHAT YOU THINK HAS HAPPENED...


"...BUT THE TRUTH IS SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY."
THAT'S RIGHT, TONY. CONTROL RESCUED ME.
WITHOUT HIM I'D ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN KILLED.
BUT... THE ATTACK. THOSE TROOPS NEVER WOULD HAVE FOUND US IF IT WASN'T FOR THE SPY DEVICE IN NATHAN'S GLASSES.
TRUE. BUT I'M HURT THAT YOU THINK IT WAS ME WHO ALERTED THEM TO THE NEXT MEN'S LOCATION.
I'VE BEEN TURNING THIS PLACE INSIDE OUT SINCE I GOT BACK, TRYING TO FIND THE MOLE WHO LEAKED THE INFORMATION.
SO FAR I'VE TURNED UP A BIG FAT NOTHING...
"...BUT I PROMISE YOU I WON'T REST UNTIL I KNOW WHO BETRAYED US."
WELL? DID SHE BUY YOUR LITTLE BILL OF GOODS?
I THINK SO. GOD, I HOPE SO. I CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE TONY A LOOSE CANNON RIGHT NOW.
I'VE TAKEN A FEW TOO MANY CHANCES IN THIS WHOLE BUSINESS, AND IT'S ALL STARTING TO CATCH UP WITH ME.
BUT THE NEXT MEN ARE FAR TOO VALUABLE, BOTH AS AGENTS AND SPECIMENS, FOR ME TO LET EVERYTHING SLIP AWAY NOW.
OF COURSE.
WERE THAT NOT THE CASE, OUR UNEASY ALLIANCE WOULD NOT EVEN EXIST...

And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Edward DeVere
17th Earl of Oxford

LOOK... YOU TELL BEN HOROWITZ WE'RE OUT HERE AND WE'RE NOT LEAVING UNTIL HE SEES US.
YEAH, TELL HIM IF HE DOESN'T COME OUT WE'LL SIC MIGNOLA ON HIM!
GRRR... GRRRR...
LOOK... I TOLD YOU GUYS THREE TIMES ALREADY...
MR. HOROWITZ ISN'T HERE RIGHT NOW.
HE'S ON THE LEFT COAST DOIN' MOVIE DEALS.
DOIN' MOVIE DEALS WITH OUR CHARACTERS, YOU MEAN!
I ONLY LET HIM HAVE HELLBOY FOR A TEMPORARY LICENSE, AND SUDDENLY HE'S GUEST-STARRING IN EVERY BOOK YOU'VE GOT!
BEWARE THE WRATH OF MIGNOLA!

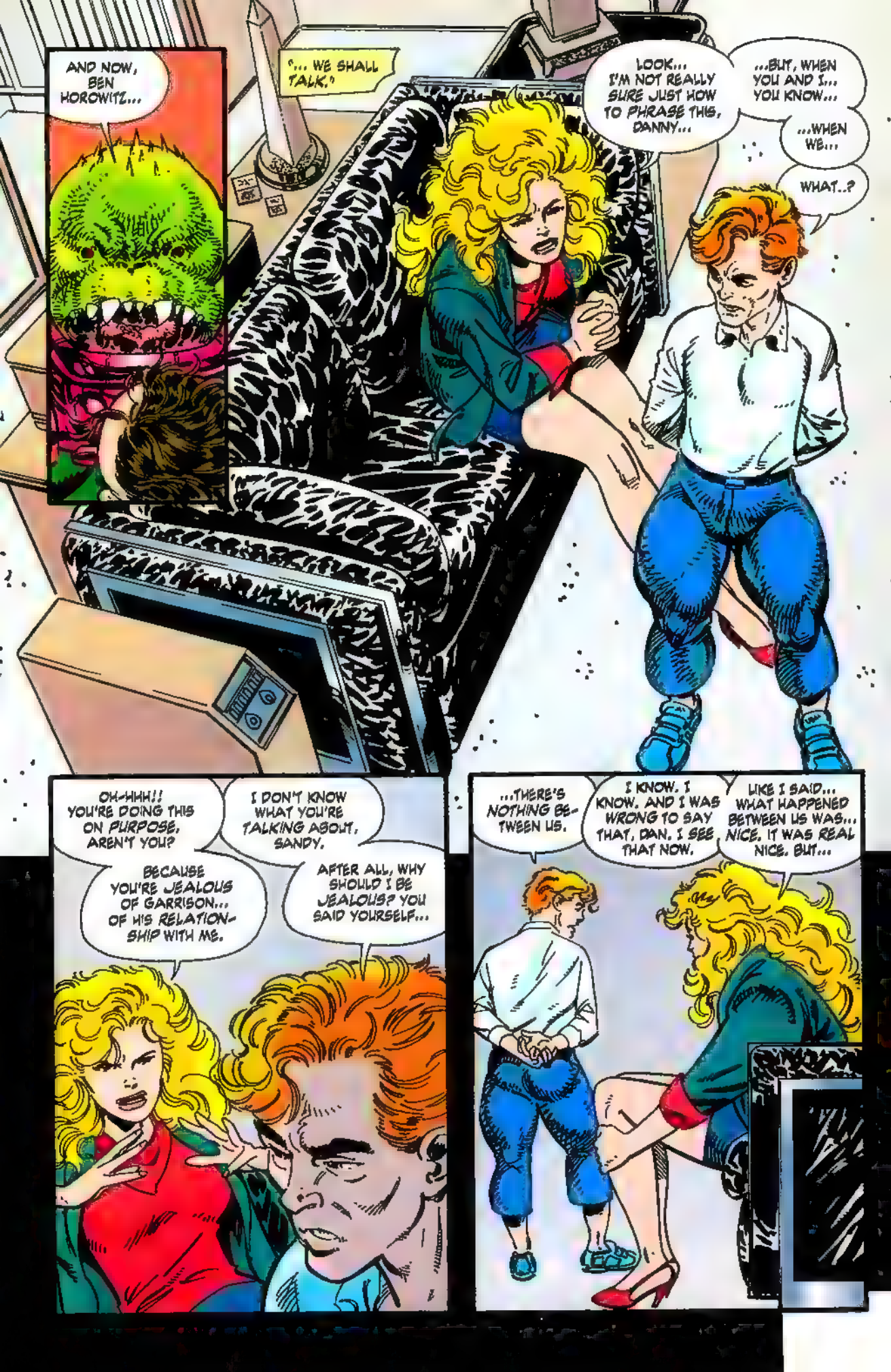

LOOK... WE DON'T WANT TO DUMP ALL THIS ON YOU. BUT WE KNOW BEN'S HERE. JUST CALL HIM OUT AND WE CAN SETTLE THIS LIKE GENTLEMEN.
GENTLE-MEN??
THERE ARE NO GENTLEMEN HERE!!
WOW! GREAT COSTUME! WHERE CAN I GET ONE DONE LIKE THAT OF HELLBOY..?

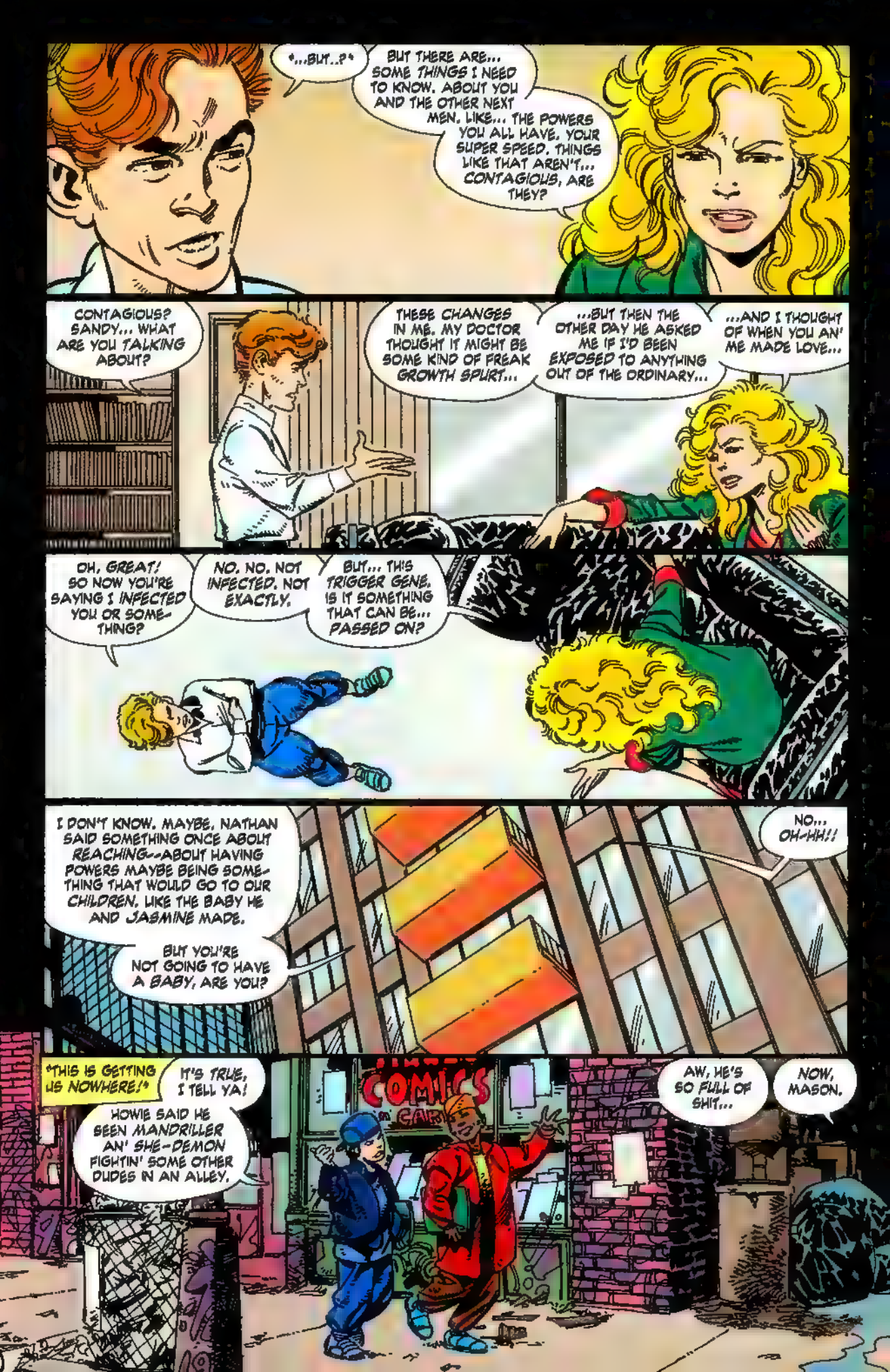
HEY...!
DON'T BURY YOURSELF IN THE PART, FELLA...
DOLLAR

THE DOOR!
OPEN THE GODDAM DOOR!!
ONE SIDE, CRETIN.
TROGG WILL OPEN IT!
NOW! BEN HOROWITZ! LEAD ME TO BEN HOROWITZ!

POLICE!
GET ME THE POLICE!
NO CALLS.
NO! NO! NO! LOOK, IRV, I'VE TOLD YOU ONCE ALREADY!
THESE CHARACTERS ARE IMPORTANT TO ME! I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU MESS 'EM UP JUST TO MAKE A MOVIE!
NO. CAN'T YOU GET IT? THE SUCCESS OF DOLLAR COMICS IS ALL IN THE CHARACTERIZATION.
IT MATTERS WHO AND WHY THE PEOPLE...
...ER...
HANG ON A MINUTE, WOULD YOU IRVING?

WHAT THE HELL IS ALL THIS RACKET..?
WHAT'S GOING ON OUT...
...HERE..?


AND NOW, BEN HOROWITZ...
"... WE SHALL TALK."
LOOK... I'M NOT REALLY SURE JUST HOW TO PHRASE THIS, DANNY...
...BUT, WHEN YOU AND I... YOU KNOW...
...WHEN WE...
WHAT..?
OH-HHH!! YOU'RE DOING THIS ON PURPOSE, AREN'T YOU?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, SANDY.
BECAUSE YOU'RE JEALOUS OF GARRISON... OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ME.
AFTER ALL, WHY SHOULD I BE JEALOUS? YOU SAID YOURSELF...
...THERE'S NOTHING BETWEEN US.
I KNOW. I KNOW. AND I WAS WRONG TO SAY THAT, DAN. I SEE THAT NOW.
LIKE I SAID... WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN US WAS... NICE. IT WAS REAL NICE. BUT...


...BUT..?
BUT THERE ARE... SOME THINGS I NEED TO KNOW. ABOUT YOU AND THE OTHER NEXT MEN. LIKE... THE POWERS YOU ALL HAVE. YOUR SUPER SPEED. THINGS LIKE THAT AREN'T... CONTAGIOUS, ARE THEY?
CONTAGIOUS? SANDY... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THESE CHANGES IN ME. MY DOCTOR THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE SOME KIND OF FREAK GROWTH SPURT...
...BUT THEN THE OTHER DAY HE ASKED ME IF I'D BEEN EXPOSED TO ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY...
...AND I THOUGHT OF WHEN YOU AN' ME MADE LOVE...
OH, GREAT! SO NOW YOU'RE SAYING I INFECTED YOU OR SOMETHING?
NO. NO. NOT INFECTED. NOT EXACTLY.
BUT... THIS TRIGGER GENE. IS IT SOMETHING THAT CAN BE... PASSED ON?
I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE. NATHAN SAID SOMETHING ONCE ABOUT REACHING--ABOUT HAVING POWERS MAYBE BEING SOMETHING THAT WOULD GO TO OUR CHILDREN. LIKE THE BABY HE AND JASMINE MADE.
BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE A BABY, ARE YOU?
NO... OH-HH!!
THIS IS GETTING US NOWHERE!
IT'S TRUE, I TELL YA!
HOWIE SAID HE SEEN MANDRILLER AN' SHE-DEMON FIGHTIN' SOME OTHER DUDES IN AN ALLEY.
COMICS
AW, HE'S SO FULL OF SHIT...
NOW, MASON.

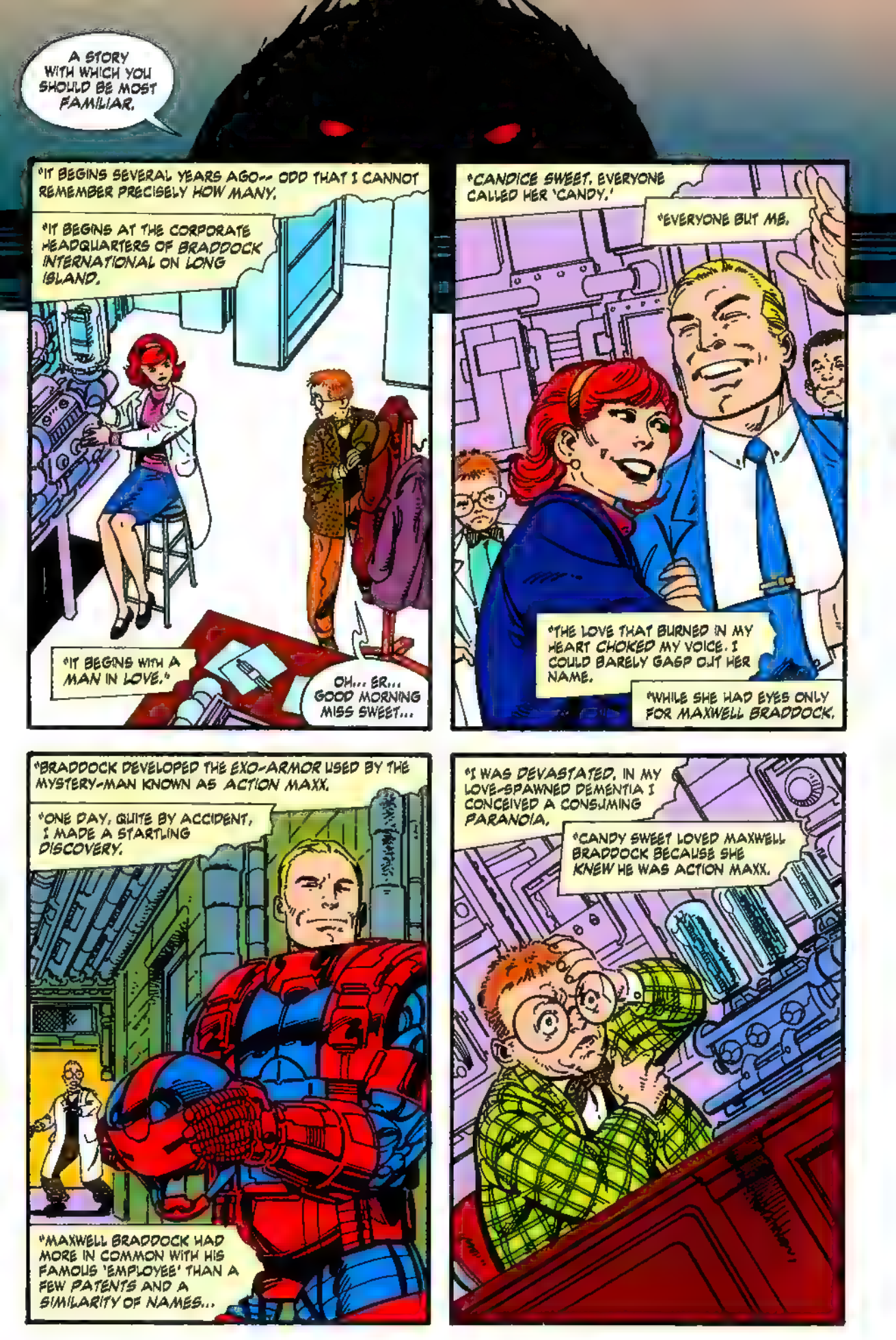
YOU SAID YOU'D HAVE TH' MONEY TODAY, Y'KNOW?
JUST ANOTHER TWENNY-FOUR HOURS, VIN, THAT'S ALL I NEED.
NOT GOOD ENOUGH, MASON.
THIS REALLY MAKES ME SAD, MASON, Y'KNOW?
I MEAN, LIKE, HERE WE TRUSTED YOU, Y'KNOW? WE LOANED YOU THE MONEY BECAUSE YOU SAID YOU'D PAY IT BACK, Y'KNOW?
NOW WE GOTTA MAKE AN EXAMPLE OUTTA YOU...
HEY!
NOT NICE...
CONCRETE..?!?
THAT'S CONCRETE!!

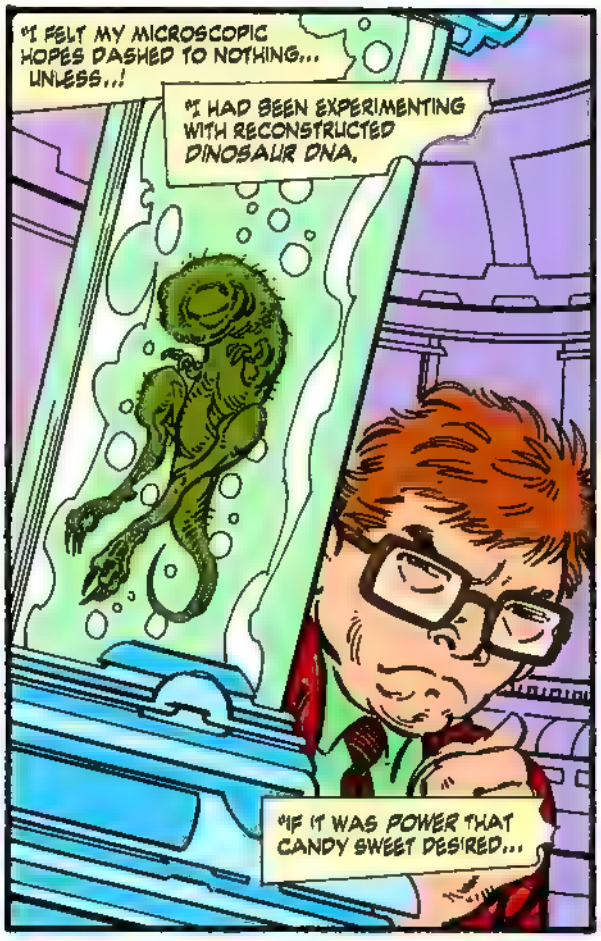
REALLY NOT VERY NICE AT ALL!
WHAT TH' HELL..?!?
YOUR TURN.
YAH!
REALLY NOT NICE.

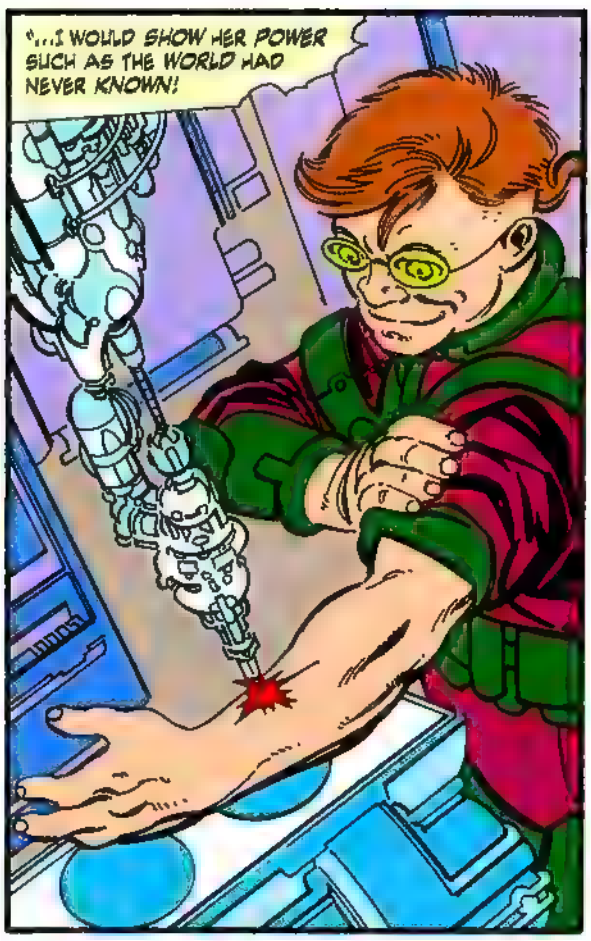
CARDS
CONCRETE..?
IT... COULDN'T BE!!

"I DON'T THINK HE'D DO THAT!"
BEN! BEN, OPEN UP!
WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE??
RALPH!
SILENCE!
YOUR FRIENDS CANNOT HELP YOU, BEN HOROWITZ. I HAVE SEALED THE DOOR WITH A LOCKING FIELD.
YOU... WHAT?
YOU MEAN LIKE I HAD OL' TROGGY USE ON ACTION MAXX IN...
YES!! YOU HAD ME USE A LOCKING FIELD!
YOU HAD ME FIGHT ENDLESS, FRUITLESS BATTLES WITH ACTION MAXX.
YOU, BEN HOROWITZ! YOU!
AND SO I HAVE ONE QUESTION. WHY??

"WHY?!?"
MARK!
HOLD ON!
I CAN'T KEEP HER UP!
"LET ME TELL YOU A STORY, HOROWITZ.

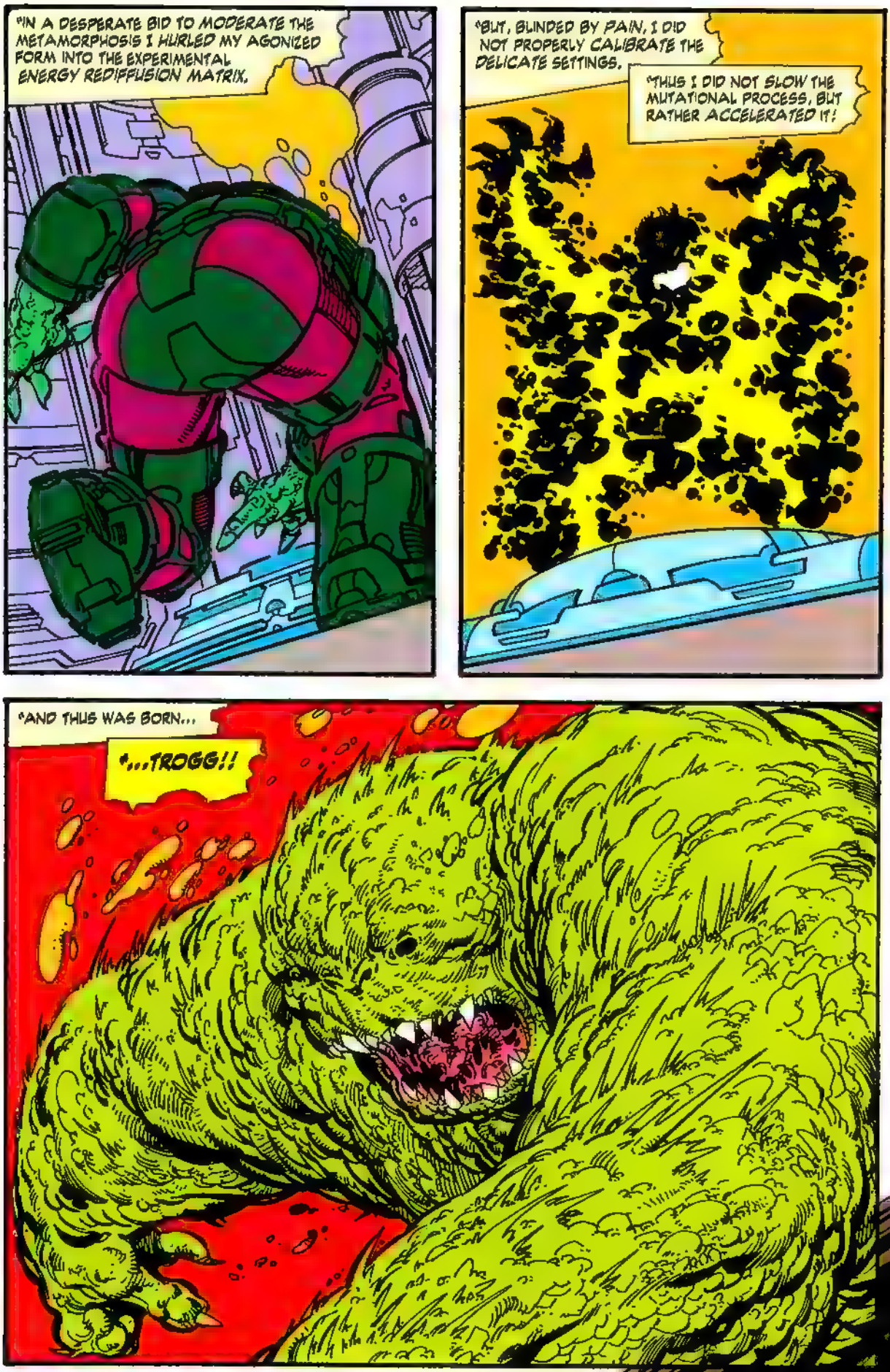

A STORY WITH WHICH YOU SHOULD BE MOST FAMILIAR.
"IT BEGINS SEVERAL YEARS AGO-- ODD THAT I CANNOT REMEMBER PRECISELY HOW MANY.
"IT BEGINS AT THE CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS OF BRADDOCK INTERNATIONAL ON LONG ISLAND.
"IT BEGINS WITH A MAN IN LOVE."
OH... ER... GOOD MORNING MISS SWEET...
"CANDICE SWEET. EVERYONE CALLED HER 'CANDY.'
"EVERYONE BUT ME.
"THE LOVE THAT BURNED IN MY HEART CHOKED MY VOICE. I COULD BARELY GASP OUT HER NAME.
"WHILE SHE HAD EYES ONLY FOR MAXWELL BRADDOCK.
"BRADDOCK DEVELOPED THE EXO-ARMOR USED BY THE MYSTERY-MAN KNOWN AS ACTION MAXX.
"ONE DAY, QUITE BY ACCIDENT, I MADE A STARTLING DISCOVERY.
"MAXWELL BRADDOCK HAD MORE IN COMMON WITH HIS FAMOUS 'EMPLOYEE' THAN A FEW PATENTS AND A SIMILARITY OF NAMES...
"I WAS DEVASTATED. IN MY LOVE-SPAWNED DEMENTIA I CONCEIVED A CONSUMING PARANOIA.
"CANDY SWEET LOVED MAXWELL BRADDOCK BECAUSE SHE KNEW HE WAS ACTION MAXX.

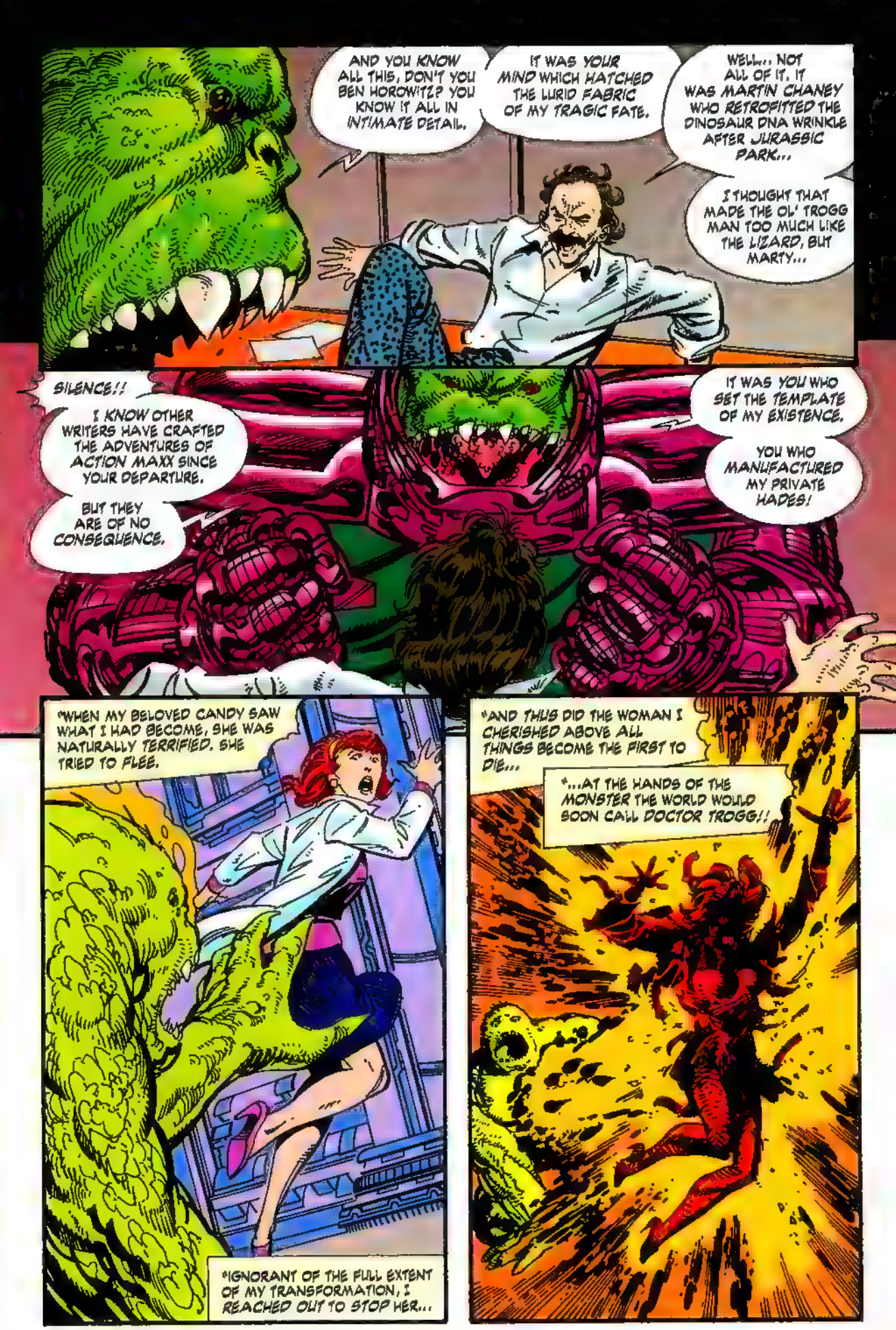

"I FELT MY MICROSCOPIC HOPES DASHED TO NOTHING... UNLESS..!
"I HAD BEEN EXPERIMENTING WITH RECONSTRUCTED DINOSAUR DNA.
"IF IT WAS POWER THAT CANDY SWEET DESIRED...


"...I WOULD SHOW HER POWER SUCH AS THE WORLD HAD NEVER KNOWN!

"THE PAIN EXPLODED THROUGH MY BODY WITH THE SPEED OF UNLEASHED LIGHTNING.

"I BEGAN TO CHANGE, TO MUTATE UNCONTROLLABLY!


"IN A DESPERATE BID TO MODERATE THE METAMORPHOSIS I HURLED MY AGONIZED FORM INTO THE EXPERIMENTAL ENERGY REDIFFUSION MATRIX.
"BUT, BLINDED BY PAIN, I DID NOT PROPERLY CALIBRATE THE DELICATE SETTINGS.
"THUS I DID NOT SLOW THE MUTATIONAL PROCESS, BUT RATHER ACCELERATED IT!
"AND THUS WAS BORN...
"...TROGG!!


AND YOU KNOW ALL THIS, DON'T YOU BEN HOROWITZ? YOU KNOW IT ALL IN INTIMATE DETAIL.
IT WAS YOUR MIND WHICH HATCHED THE LURID FABRIC OF MY TRAGIC FATE.
WELL... NOT ALL OF IT. IT WAS MARTIN CHANEY WHO RETROFITTED THE DINOSAUR DNA WRINKLE AFTER JURASSIC PARK...
I THOUGHT THAT MADE THE OL' TROGG MAN TOO MUCH LIKE THE LIZARD, BUT MARTY...
SILENCE!!
I KNOW OTHER WRITERS HAVE CRAFTED THE ADVENTURES OF ACTION MAXX SINCE YOUR DEPARTURE.
BUT THEY ARE OF NO CONSEQUENCE.
IT WAS YOU WHO SET THE TEMPLATE OF MY EXISTENCE.
YOU WHO MANUFACTURED MY PRIVATE HADES!
"WHEN MY BELOVED CANDY SAW WHAT I HAD BECOME, SHE WAS NATURALLY TERRIFIED. SHE TRIED TO FLEE.
"IGNORANT OF THE FULL EXTENT OF MY TRANSFORMATION, I REACHED OUT TO STOP HER...
"AND THUS DID THE WOMAN I CHERISHED ABOVE ALL THINGS BECOME THE FIRST TO DIE...
"...AT THE HANDS OF THE MONSTER THE WORLD WOULD SOON CALL DOCTOR TROGG!!

"BRADDOCK, WHEN HE ARRIVED, GAVE ME NO CHANCE TO EXPLAIN,
"AS I CRADLED THE CORPSE OF MY BELOVED...
"...ACTION MAXX ATTACKED ME AS THOUGH I WERE SOME COMMON MISCREANT!
"SO WAS BORN AN ABIDING HATRED THE PASSING YEARS HAVE DONE NOTHING TO DIMINISH.
"TIME AND AGAIN I HAVE HURLED MY POWER AND INTELLECT AGAINST ACTION MAXX...
"...AND TIME AND AGAIN I HAVE BEEN DEFEATED!
YET NONE OF THIS WAS IN THE LEAST BIT NECESSARY.
IT WAS IN YOUR POWER TO GRANT ME ETERNAL HAPPINESS...
...WITH NOTHING MORE THAN A FEW STROKES OF A TYPEWRITER!

OKAY... OKAY. I'VE LET THIS RUN LONG ENOUGH FOR THE COPS TO HAVE GOTTEN HERE.
NOW...
WHAT IN..??
YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU, BEN HOROWITZ?
I TOLD YOU I HAD PLACED A LOCKING FIELD ON THAT DOOR.
BUT... BUT THAT'S NOT...
NOT WHAT?
NOT POSSIBLE? BUT THAT IS WHERE YOU ARE WRONG.

EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE NOW. I DO NOT KNOW HOW OR WHY...
...BUT I AM REAL, AND THE MOMENT OF MY ULTIMATE VENGEANCE IS AT HAND.
A MOMENT YOU WILL HELP ME ACHIEVE!
A SCRIPT, BEN HOROWITZ! YOU WILL WRITE A SCRIPT IN WHICH I FINALLY TRIUMPH!
ACTION MAXX WILL BE REVEALED AS A HOLLOW CHARLATAN! CANDY SWEET WILL BE RESURRECTED.
AND TROGG WILL BE THE HERO OF ALL THE WORLD!
YOU MUST BE OUT OF YOUR COTTON-PICKIN' MIND!
EVEN IF I BELIEVED FOR ONE SECOND THAT YOU'RE SOMEHOW REALLY DOCTOR TROGG...
...THERE'S NO WAY I'D EVER WRITE A SCRIPT LIKE THAT! IT WOULD BE A BETRAYAL OF EVERYTHING I'VE DONE!
NOT TO MENTION LETTING DOWN HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF LOYAL FANS!
TRY TO UNDERSTAND, HOROWITZ.
YOU WILL DO EXACTLY AS I SAY...

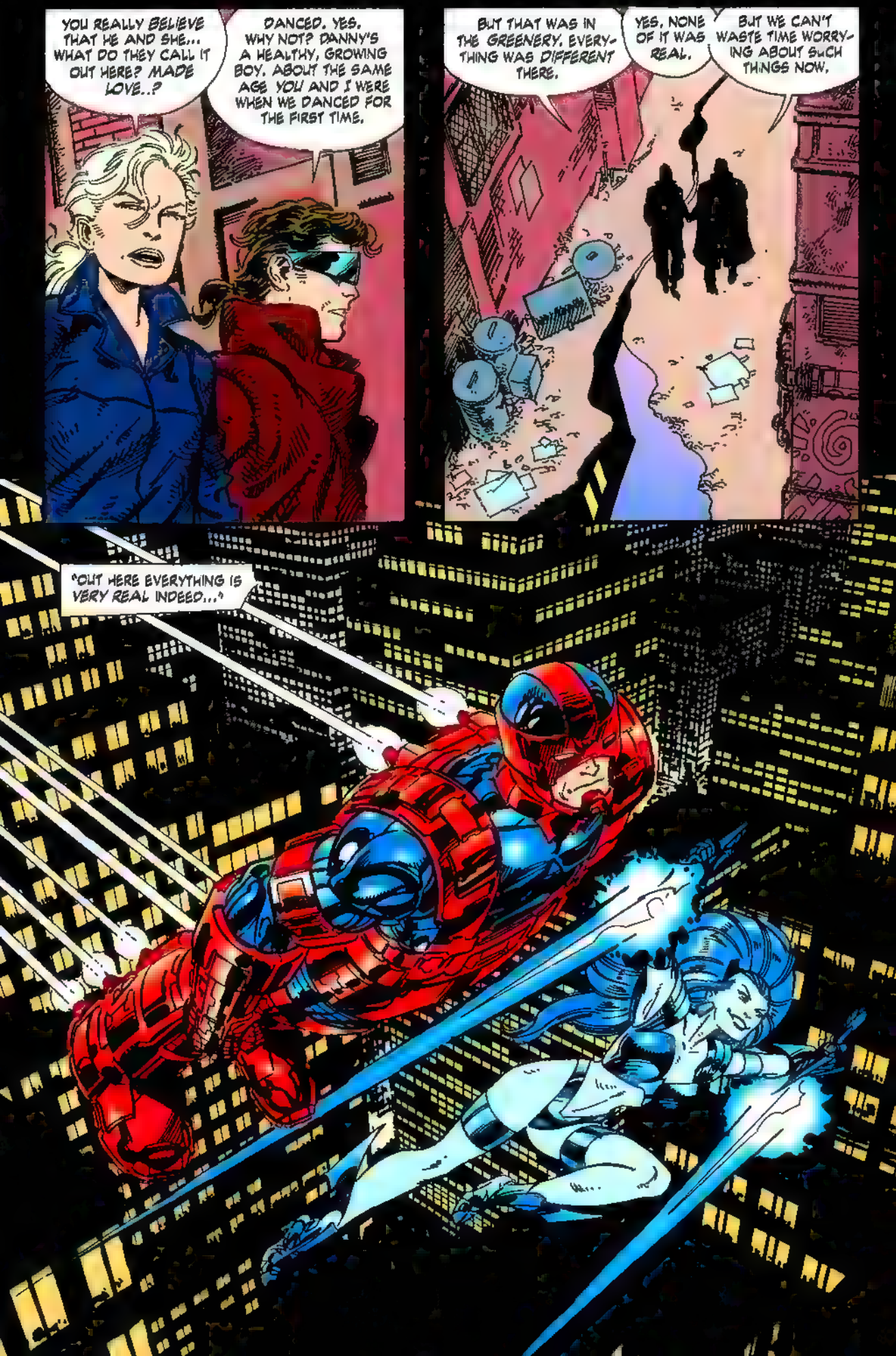
"...OR YOU WILL DIE."
IS HE..?
DEAD? YES, ALL IN ALL A REMARKABLY... PEACEFUL END.
I'M NOT SURE HE'D EARNED IT.
WE'VE COME TO THE POINT WHERE YOU AND YOUR "BOYS" START TO EARN YOUR MONEY.
FIRST BY GETTING RID OF THE BODY.
HUH? LOOK, DOC, HE'S BIN PAYIN' ME AN' THE BOYS FIVE GRAND A WEEK JUST TO HANG AROUND.
AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED HE BOUGHT HIMSELF A ONE-WAY TICKET TO PARADISE.
MM. BUT THEN, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I KNOW, DO YOU?
IN ANY CASE, IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW.

WHAT THERE IS OF IT.
JESUS CHRIST!!
NOT EVEN CLOSE, FRIEND.
NOW...
...IF YOUR PAL'S FINISHED PUKING ALL OVER MY NICE CLEAN FLOOR...
...YOU CAN DISPOSE OF THE REMAINS AS HE INSTRUCTED.
THEN COME BACK HERE.
"HE'S LEFT A DISK OF FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOU TO CARRY OUT..."
BEN! PLEASE! OPEN THE DOOR!
OKAY, SIR...

"LEAVE IT TO US."
BEN!
BEN! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
WHERE'S..?
GONE.
HE JUST... VANISHED.
THE BASTARD.
WHAT... WHAT DID HE DO TO YOU?

NOTHING, HE DIDN'T HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO ANYTHING.
BECAUSE HE VANISHED BEFORE I COULD MAKE MY CHOICE.
CHOICE?
BEN... WHO WAS THAT GUY?
DOCTOR TROGG, RALPHIE. HE WAS REALLY, HONESTLY, NO SHIT DOCTOR TROGG.
AND HE WAS MAD, RALPHIE. MAD ABOUT ALL THE THINGS I'D DONE TO HIM OVER THE YEARS.
SAID HE WANTED ME TO WRITE A SCRIPT THAT WOULD CHANGE EVERY-THING.
SAID HE'D KILL ME IF I DIDN'T DO IT.
THEN HE JUST... FADED AWAY, THE BASTARD.
BUT... THAT'S GOOD, ISN'T IT, BEN?
YOU'RE ALIVE.
SURE, ALIVE. AND FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE... I'LL NEVER KNOW WHAT MY CHOICE WOULD HAVE BEEN.
AFTER ALL MY HIGH AND MIGHTY WORDS ABOUT THE SANCTITY OF MY CHARACTERS...

"...I'LL NEVER KNOW IF I REALLY WOULD HAVE DIED TO PROTECT THEM..."
SANDY TOLLIVER? NO, I HAVEN'T SEEN HER 'ROUND HERE IN... OH, MUST BE A COUPLE OF WEEKS OR MORE.
DID SHE LEAVE A FORWARDING ADDRESS? OR A PHONE NUMBER WHERE SHE COULD BE REACHED?
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT... SHE DID!
MIND IF I ASK WHY YOU'RE LOOKING FOR HER? ARE YOU COPS OR SOMETHING?
YES, WE'RE... COPS.
AND... THANK YOU.
WELL? WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
PROCEED AS WE'VE ALREADY DECIDED.
WE HAVE TO FIND JASMINE AND DANNY--AND IF WE CAN LOCATE SANDY, I SOMEHOW SUSPECT DANNY WON'T BE FAR AWAY.
HEINZ


YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT HE AND SHE... WHAT DO THEY CALL IT OUT HERE? MADE LOVE..?
DANCED. YES. WHY NOT? DANNY'S A HEALTHY, GROWING BOY. ABOUT THE SAME AGE YOU AND I WERE WHEN WE DANCED FOR THE FIRST TIME.
BUT THAT WAS IN THE GREENERY. EVERYTHING WAS DIFFERENT THERE.
YES. NONE OF IT WAS REAL.
BUT WE CAN'T WASTE TIME WORRYING ABOUT SUCH THINGS NOW.
"OUT HERE EVERYTHING IS VERY REAL INDEED..."

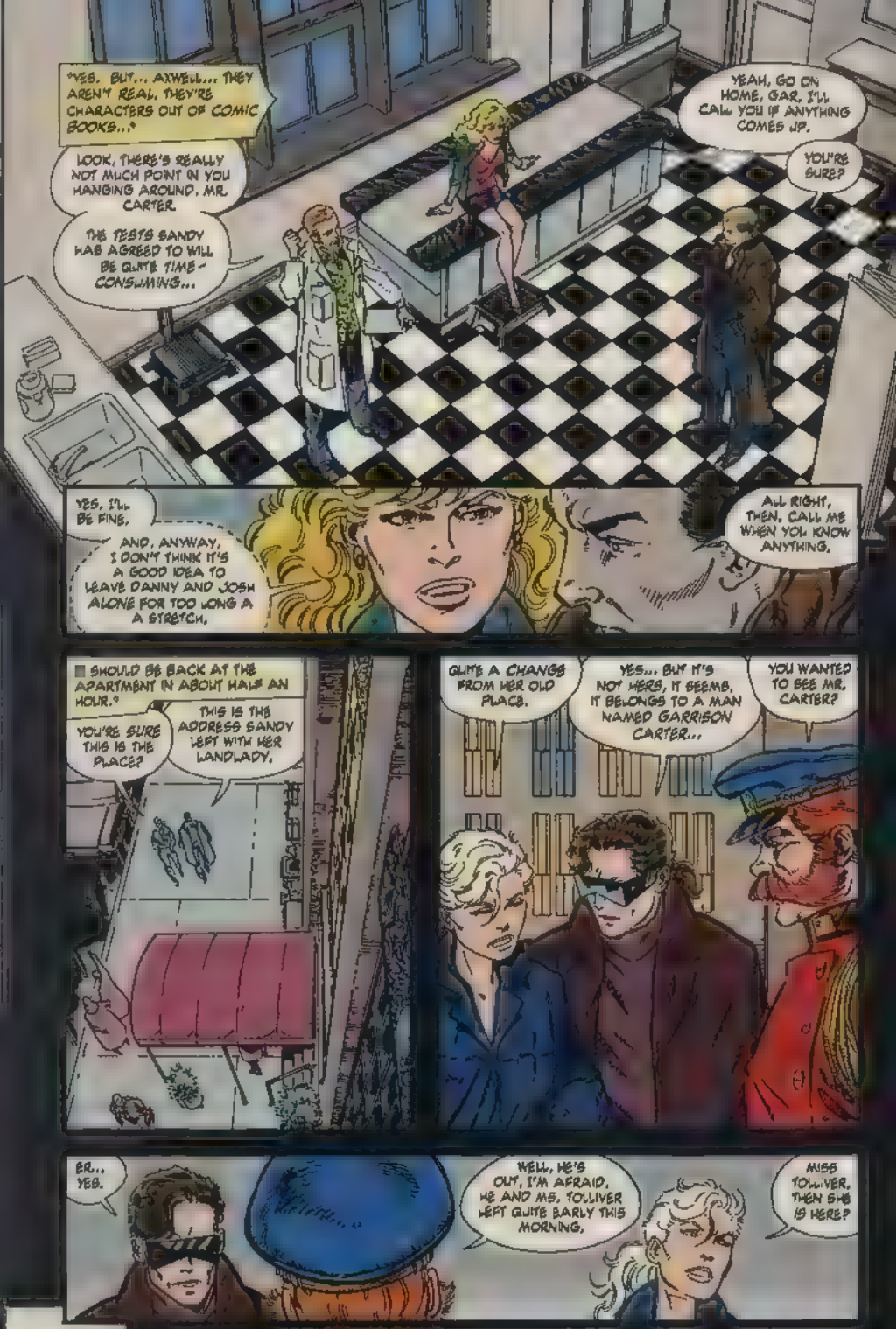
I had a dream which was not all a dream.
Lord Byron
1788 - 1824
THIS ISN'T HOME, IS IT AXWELL?
NO.
ALTHOUGH I AM NOT SURE WHY I SHOULD THINK NOT.
IT IS ONLY THAT THINGS DO NOT FEEL RIGHT.
THAT ABOUT SAYS IT. THAT...
...AND THE FACT THAT I HAVE NO IDEA HOW WE GOT HERE.
YES. IN POINT OF FACT, I AM NOT SURE I CAN REMEMBER WHERE WE WERE BEFORE...
CURSE
RRRRRR

MY! THAT'S A BIG ONE!
INDEED. AS FINE A SPECIMEN OF CANUS LUPUS AS I HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED.
NOT THAT I'M CERTAIN I'VE EVER ACTUALLY ENCOUNTERED ONE BEFORE...
I'M BEGINNING TO THINK I SMELL GORILDOZER OR MY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING SISTER IN THIS.
PERHAPS. EITHER WAY, IT WOULD SEEM OUR FURRY VISITOR HAS DEFINITELY SMELLED SOMETHING...
...AND HE DOESN'T LIKE IT!

GET HIM OFF ME, WOULD YOU, AXWELL?
I MAY BE THE STRONGEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD, BUT I DON'T THINK I CAN DO MUCH HERE SHORT OF KILLING HIM.
ALWAYS A LAST RESORT.
WHAT?!
KEEP BACK! YOU'RE BIGGER AND FURRIER THAN ANY MAN-THING I'VE EVER SEEN...
...BUT YOUR BLOOD IS JUST AS RED!
IMPUDENT AND IMPRUDENT, MY SMALL FRIEND. ALTHOUGH I FIND VIOLENCE QUITE ABHORRENT...

...THERE ARE CERTAIN INSTANCES IN WHICH I AM MORE THAN ABLE TO OVERCOME MY RETICENCE IN USING IT.
NO CLOSER, THANK YOU.
CLUTTER... ARE YOU HURT?
ONLY MY PRIDE, SKYWISE. I MISJUDGED THE BEAST'S SPEED.
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE, TAM.
WHEREVER HERE IS... AND WHICHEVER WAY IS OUT.
YES.
HUH?

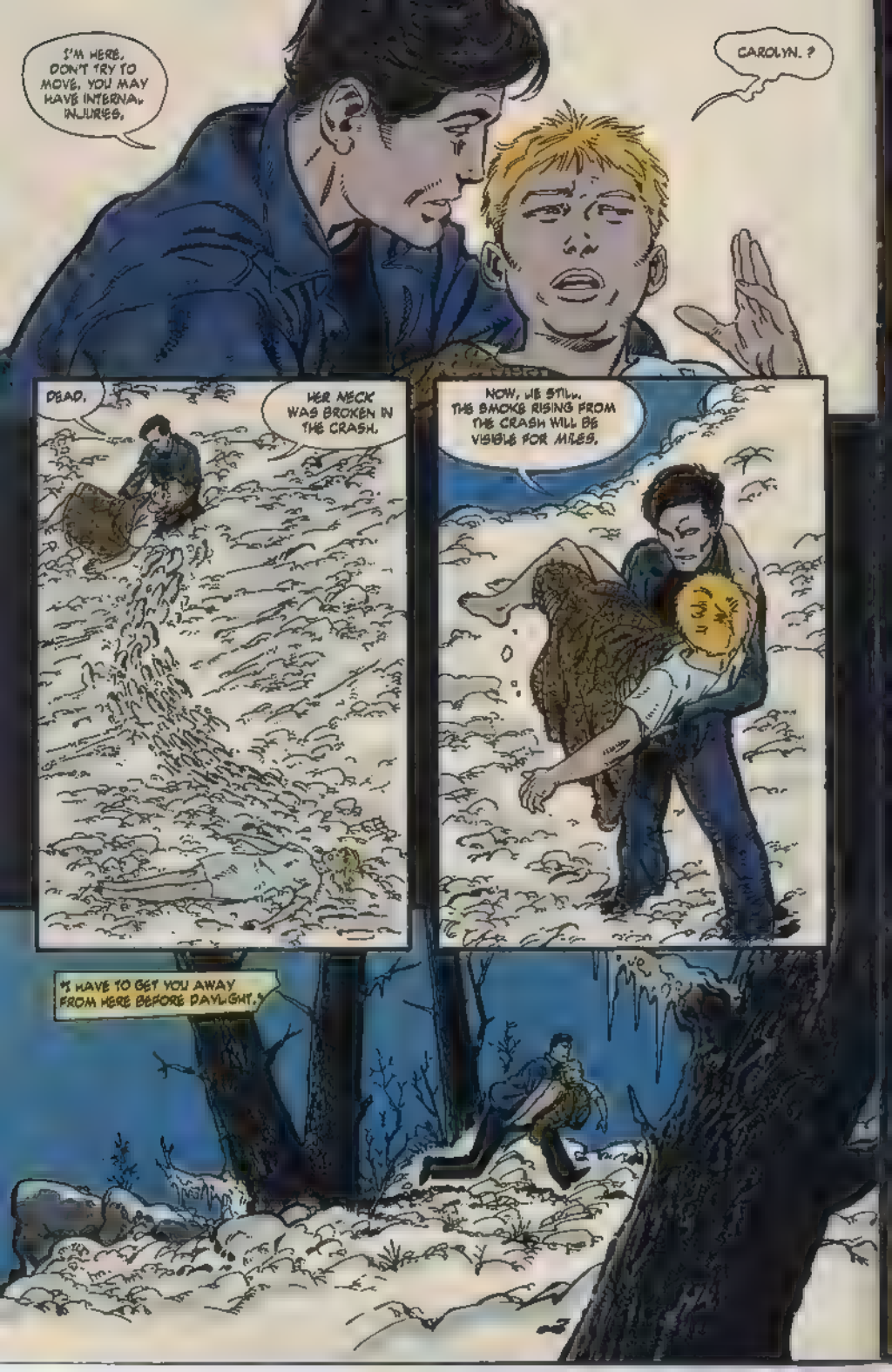
NOT QUITE SO FAST, I THINK...
GONE!
UNLIKELY. THIS WOULD APPEAR TO BE A BLIND ALLEY.
BUT NO MORE UNLIKELY THAN MEETING THOSE TWO CHARACTERS IN THE FIRST PLACE.
YOU RECOGNIZED THEM?

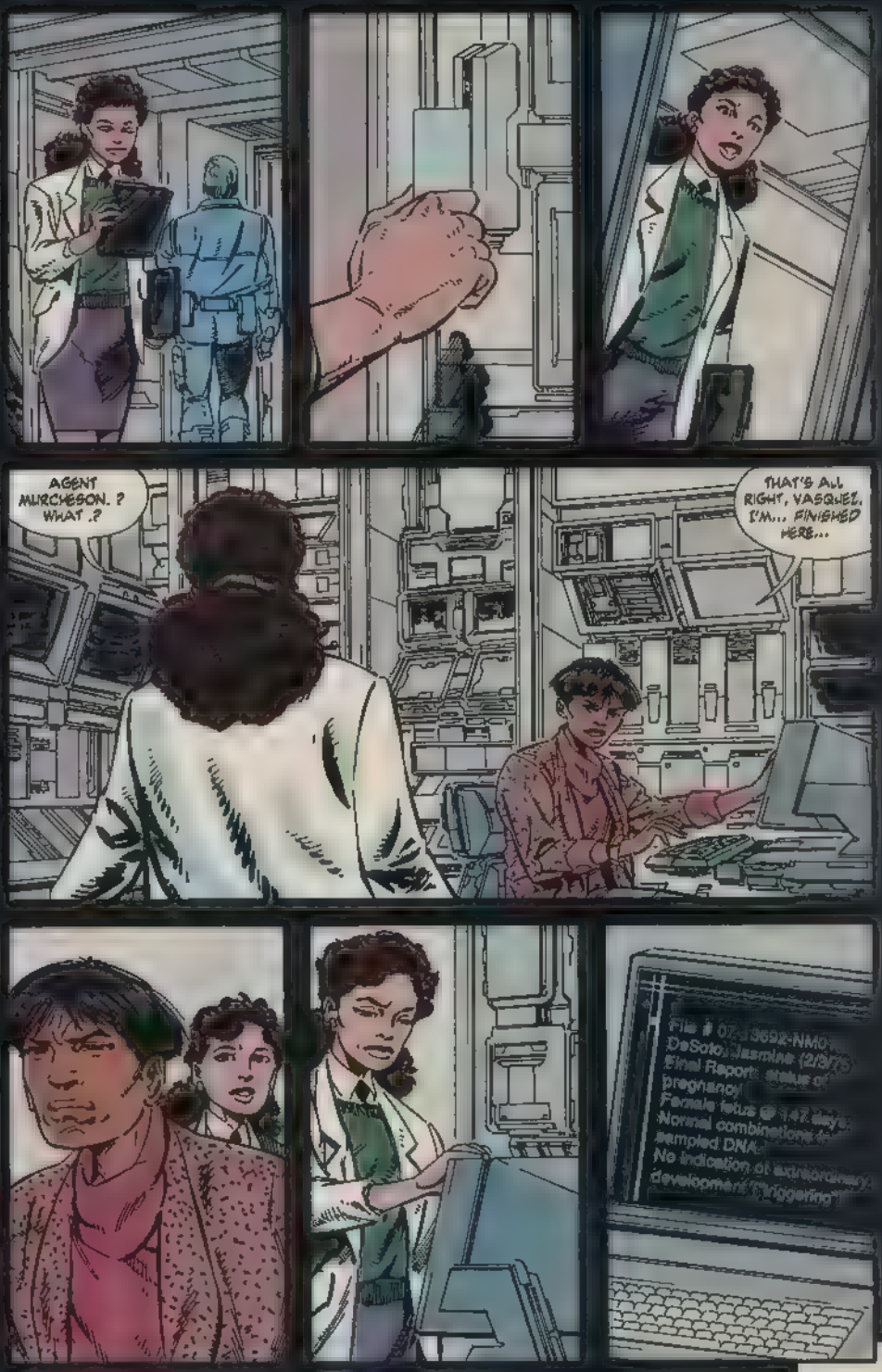

"YES. BUT... AXWELL... THEY AREN'T REAL. THEY'RE CHARACTERS OUT OF COMIC BOOKS..."
LOOK, THERE'S REALLY NOT MUCH POINT IN YOU HANGING AROUND, MR CARTER.
THE TESTS SANDY HAS AGREED TO WILL BE QUITE TIME-CONSUMING...
YEAH, GO ON HOME, GAR. I'LL CALL YOU IF ANYTHING COMES UP.
YOU'RE SURE?
YES, I'LL BE FINE.
AND, ANYWAY, I DON'T THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO LEAVE DANNY AND JOSH ALONE FOR TOO LONG A A STRETCH.
ALL RIGHT, THEN. CALL ME WHEN YOU KNOW ANYTHING.
SHOULD BE BACK AT THE APARTMENT IN ABOUT HALF AN HOUR."
YOU'RE SURE THIS IS THE PLACE?
THIS IS THE ADDRESS SANDY LEFT WITH HER LANDLADY.
QUITE A CHANGE FROM HER OLD PLACE.
YES... BUT IT'S NOT HERS, IT SEEMS. IT BELONGS TO A MAN NAMED GARRISON CARTER...
YOU WANTED TO SEE MR. CARTER?
ER... YES.
WELL, HE'S OUT, I'M AFRAID. HE AND MS. TOLLIVER LEFT QUITE EARLY THIS MORNING.
MISS TOLLIVER, THEN SHE IS HERE?

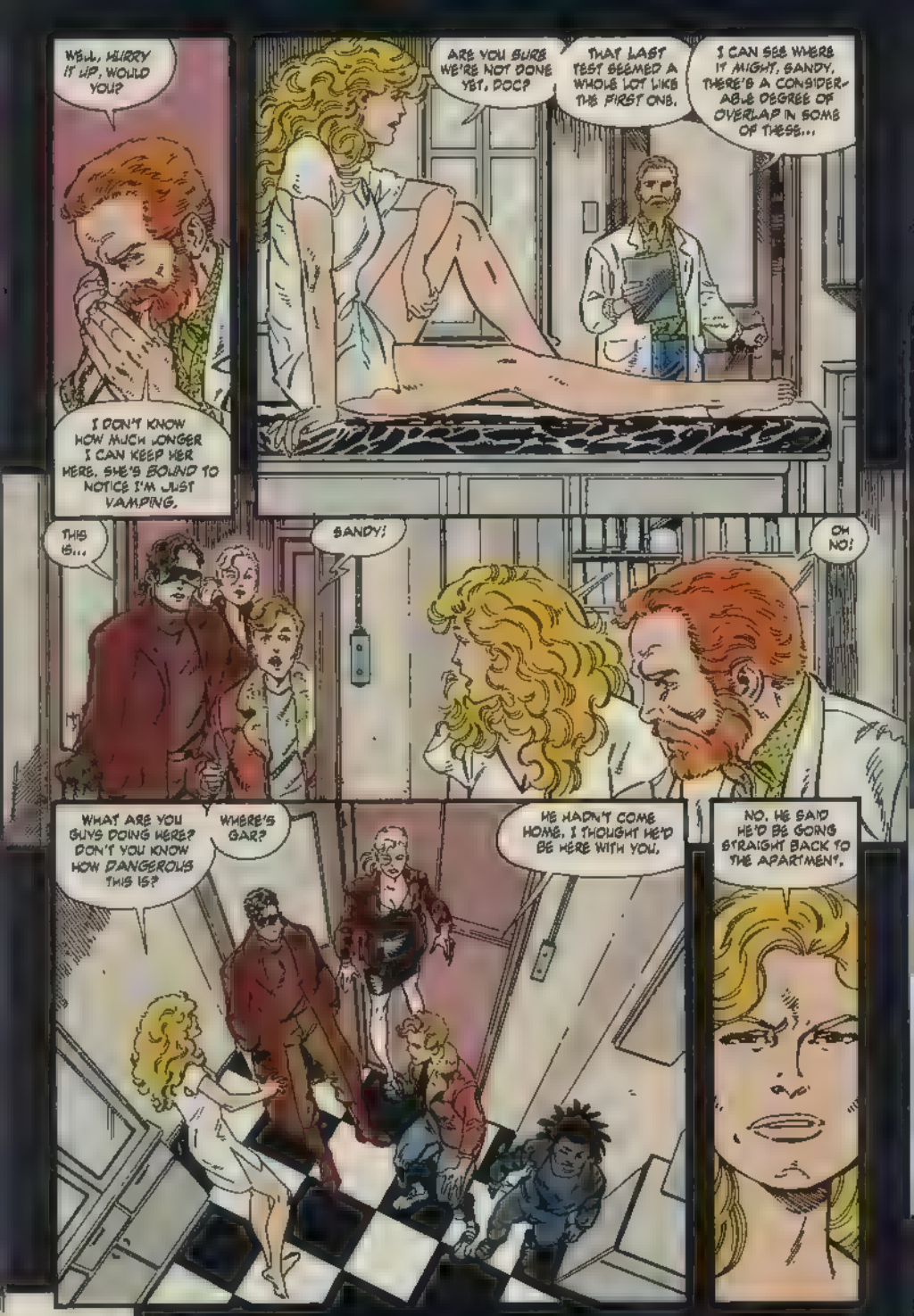
IF YOU'D LIKE TO LEAVE A MESSAGE, I COULD GIVE IT TO MR. CARTER WHEN HE COMES HOME.
ER... WELL, ACTUALLY WE HAVE A DELIVERY FOR MR. CARTER. I WONDER IF WE MIGHT LEAVE IT IN HIS APARTMENT?
NO, I'M AFRAID NOT. BUT IF YOU GIVE IT TO ME, I'LL HOLD IT IN MY OFFICE, INSIDE.
WELL... I SUPPOSE THAT WILL HAVE TO DO...
BE SURE HE GETS THIS, WOULD YOU? IT'S...
OOPS...
I'LL GET IT...
WHAT IN THE..?

NICELY DONE, BETH. NOW, LET'S FIND THE ELEVATOR...
"...AND CARTER'S APARTMENT."
IT'S DOWN THERE. I CAN SEE PEOPLE.
HARD TO TELL, BUT I THINK ONE OF THEM IS DANNY.
I CAN HEAR A TELEVISION SET.
RING THE BELL.

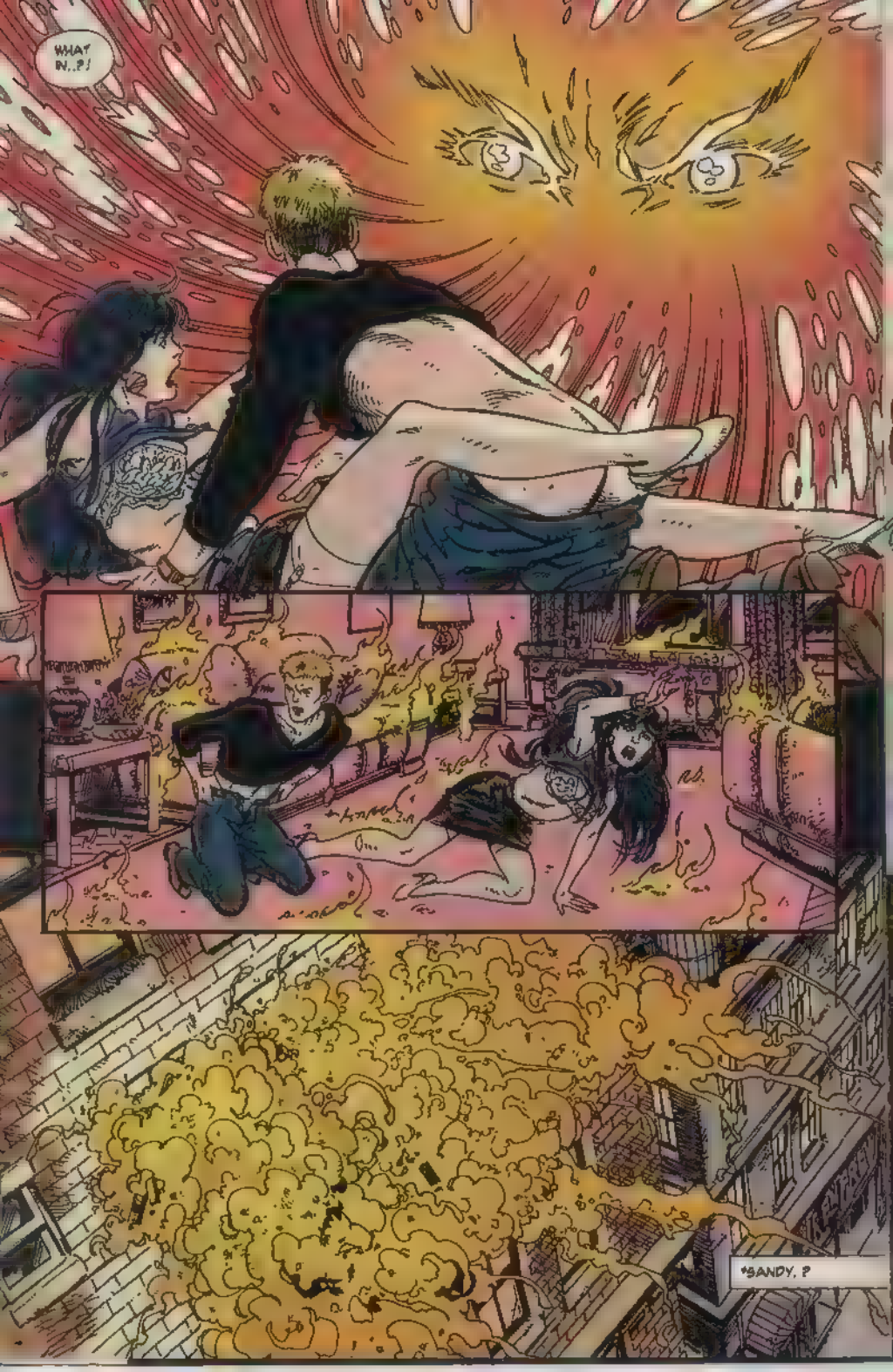
...APPREHENDED BY A MAN DRESSED IN BLUE, WEARING A RED CAPE...
WHO COULD THAT BE?
THE DOORMAN WOULDN'T LET ANYONE IN WITHOUT [illegible] UP...
HOLY..!
BETH! NATHAN!
DANNY!
MARK ?

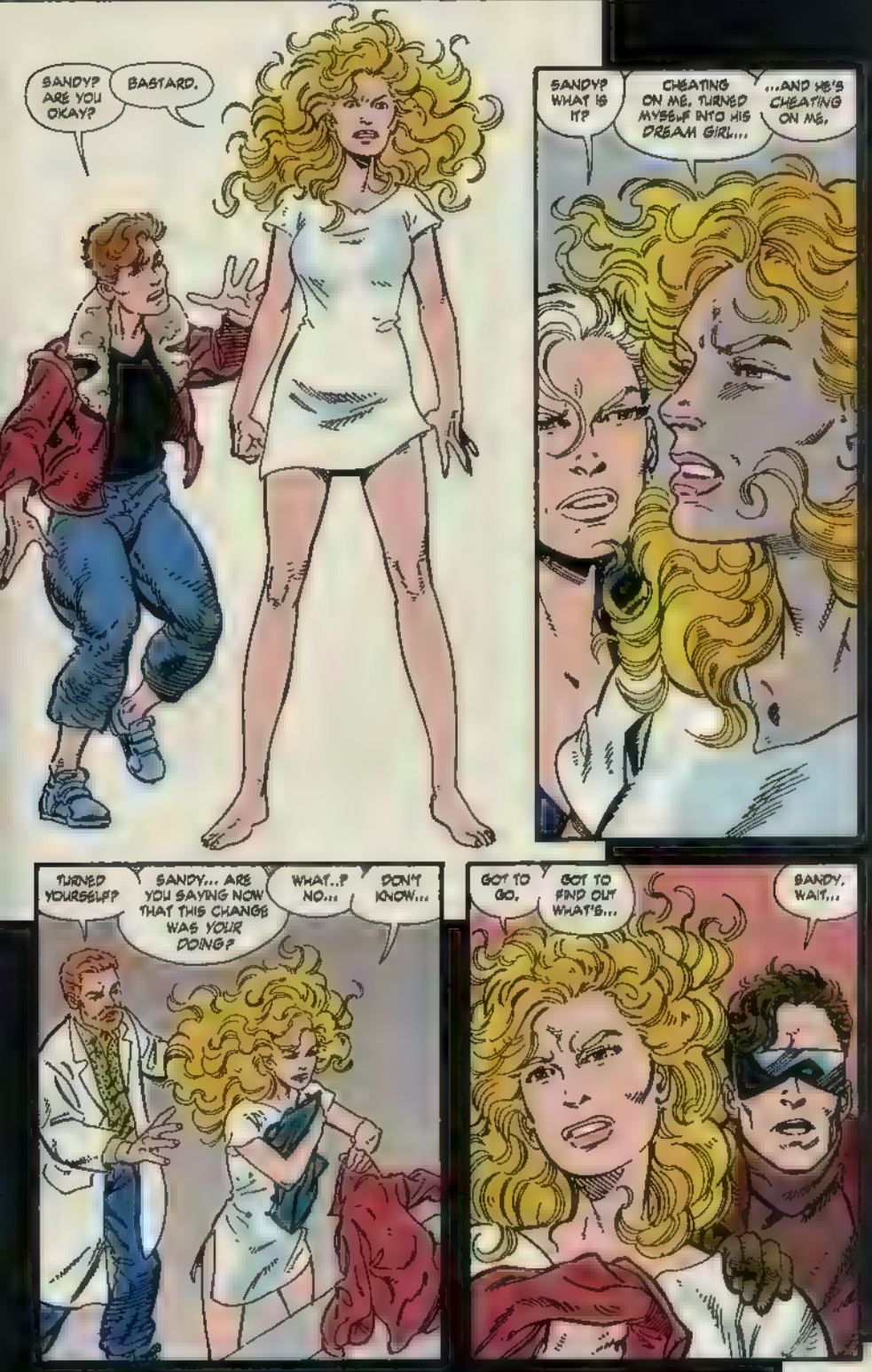

I'M HERE, DON'T TRY TO MOVE, YOU MAY HAVE INTERNAL INJURIES.
CAROLYN. ?
DEAD.
HER NECK WAS BROKEN IN THE CRASH.
NOW, WE STILL. THE SMOKE RISING FROM THE CRASH WILL BE VISIBLE FOR MILES.
I HAVE TO GET YOU AWAY FROM HERE BEFORE DAYLIGHT.


AGENT MURCHESON. ? WHAT .?
THAT'S ALL RIGHT, VASQUEZ. I'M... FINISHED HERE...
File # 07-3692-NMO
DeSoto, Jasmine (2/3/75)
Final Report: status of pregnancy
Female fetus @ 147 days
Normal combinations
sampled DNA
No indication of extraordinary development "triggering"


WELL, HURRY IT UP, WOULD YOU?
I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN KEEP HER HERE. SHE'S BOUND TO NOTICE I'M JUST VAMPING.
ARE YOU SURE WE'RE NOT DONE YET, DOC?
THAT LAST TEST SEEMED A WHOLE LOT LIKE THE FIRST ONE.
I CAN SEE WHERE IT MIGHT, SANDY, THERE'S A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF OVERLAP IN SOME OF THESE...
THIS IS...
SANDY!
OH NO!
WHAT ARE YOU GUYS DOING HERE? DON'T YOU KNOW HOW DANGEROUS THIS IS?
WHERE'S GAR?
HE HADN'T COME HOME. I THOUGHT HE'D BE HERE WITH YOU.
NO. HE SAID HE'D BE GOING STRAIGHT BACK TO THE APARTMENT.

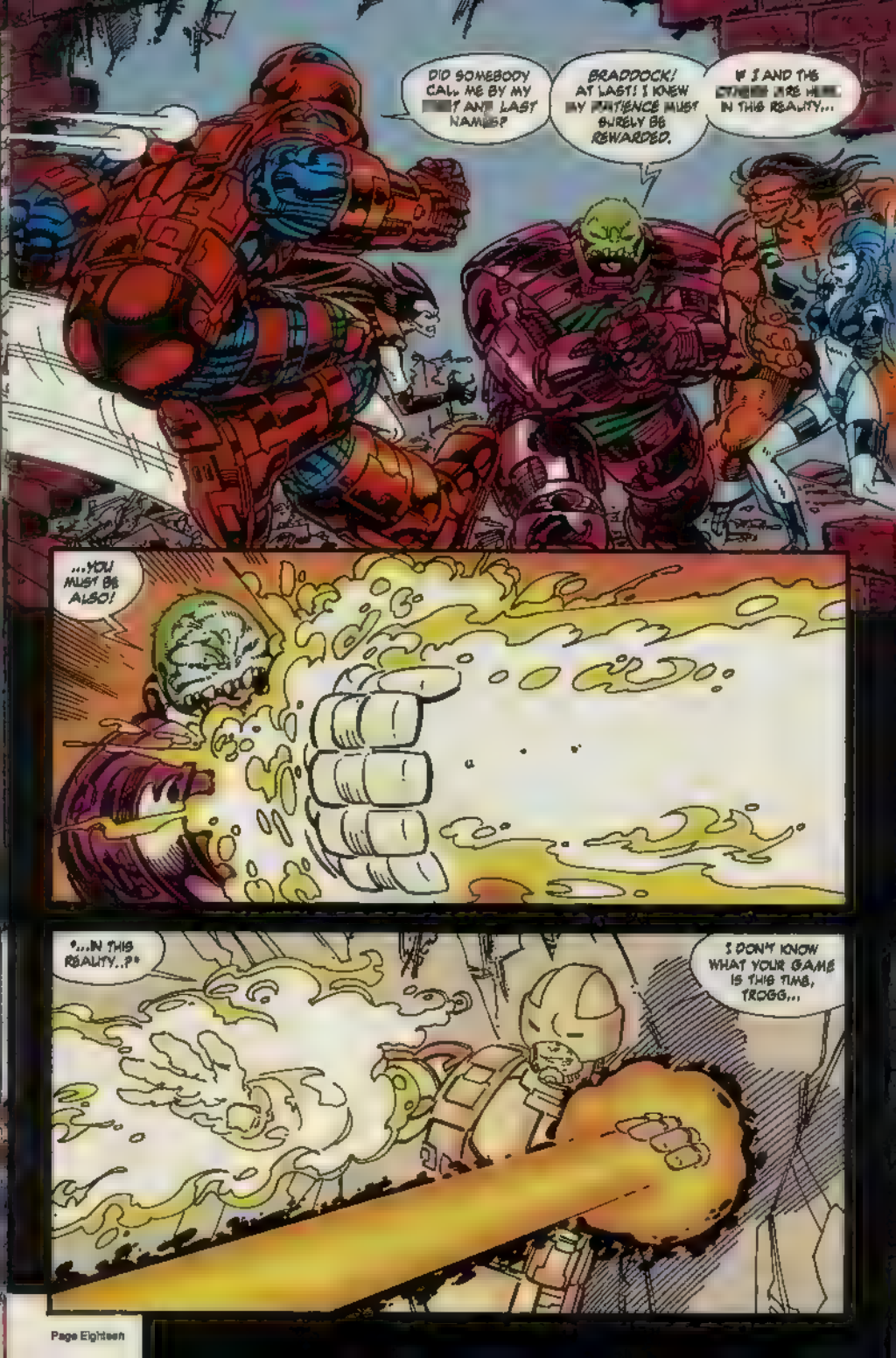
"WHERE COULD ME BE. ?"
DON'T WORRY ABOUT HER.
SHE'LL BE TIED UP AT THE DOCTOR'S FOR HOURS YET.
THAT'S PRETTY COLD, MR. CARTER.
"GAR."
I TOLD YOU YOU SHOULD CALL ME "GAR."
IT'S WHAT ALL MY FRIENDS CALL ME...
OH-HH...
GAR...
GAR..?


WHAT IN..?!
*SANDY, ?


SANDY? ARE YOU OKAY?
BASTARD.
SANDY? WHAT IS IT?
CHEATING ON ME. TURNED MYSELF INTO HIS DREAM GIRL...
...AND HE'S CHEATING ON ME.
TURNED YOURSELF?
SANDY... ARE YOU SAYING NOW THAT THIS CHANGE WAS YOUR DOING?
WHAT..? NO...
DON'T KNOW...
GOT TO GO.
GOT TO FIND OUT WHAT'S...
SANDY, WAIT...

AND NOW, WE SHALL HAVE SOME ANSWERS.
DOCTOR TROGG..?!?
THE SAME, NOW... TELL ME...

NOT SO FAST, TROGGY.
YOU AND I HAVE SOME BUSINESS TO DISCUSS FROM OUR LAST MEETING.
AS DO WE, SWEETS.
NOW NOW, SHE-DEMON! YOU KNOW IT'S NOT POLITE TO INTERRUPT A CONVERSATION!
BRUTUS? THE BLUE DAHLIA? SHE-DEMON?
BUT... BUT THEY'RE ALL COMIC-BOOK CHARACTERS LIKE ACTION MAXX!


DID SOMEBODY CALL ME BY MY [redacted] AND LAST NAME?
BRADDOCK! AT LAST! I KNEW MY PATIENCE MUST SURELY BE REWARDED.
IF I AND THE [redacted] ARE HERE, IN THIS REALITY...
...YOU MUST BE ALSO!
"...IN THIS REALITY..?"
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR GAME IS THIS TIME, TROGG...

...BUT DON'T EVEN IMAGINE YOU CAN DISTRACT ME FROM SQUASHING YOU LIKE THE BUG YOU ARE.
WHAT IN HELL IS GOING ON?
DANNY..?
I DON'T KNOW! THESE ARE ALL CHARACTERS FROM DOLLAR COMICS.
AND THERE WAS A STORY ON THE TV NEWS ABOUT...
LOOK OUT!!
BETH!!
WHAT IN..?!?

THIS IS BEYOND OUR POWERS TO COPE WITH!
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!
SANDY...
SANDY! WHERE'S SANDY??
WHERE'S JOSH?
NO TIME TO LOOK FOR THEM. STRATEGIC RETREAT!
NOW!
IF WE CAN GET CLEAR OF THE BATTLE ZONE WE CAN MAKE A BETTER ASSESSMENT OF...
GOOD CHRIST!
MP
MP
MP
THE NEXT MEN!!

MP
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
IT'S ANOTHER ONE! ANOTHER SUPER-FREAK!
WELL! IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE BEEN CALLED THAT, SOLDIER!
TIME YOU LEARNED SOME MANNERS!
TURNER C.

IN HERE.
THERE'S NOBODY IN HERE.
COURTNEY ROSE
BUT THIS WON'T DO US MUCH GOOD, NATHAN! WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF THIS BUILDING!
PRECISELY WHAT I HAD IN MIND, BETHANY.
UP THE FIRE ESCAPE, YOU TWO.
"WITH LUCK WE CAN MAKE OUR ESCAPE OVER THE ROOFTOPS."
NATHAN! LOOK!
THOSE... THOSE LOOK LIKE THE TRAILS LEFT BY SOME OF THE FLYING CHARACTERS IN THE COMICS!

THAT WAS FIREBALL!
SHE'S ONE OF THE WILD FIVE!
NATMAN... I'M FRIGHTENED.
NO MORE THAN I AM, BETH. EVERYTHING IS GOING CRAZY...
...AND SOMETHING TELLS ME SANDY TOLLIVER IS AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL!

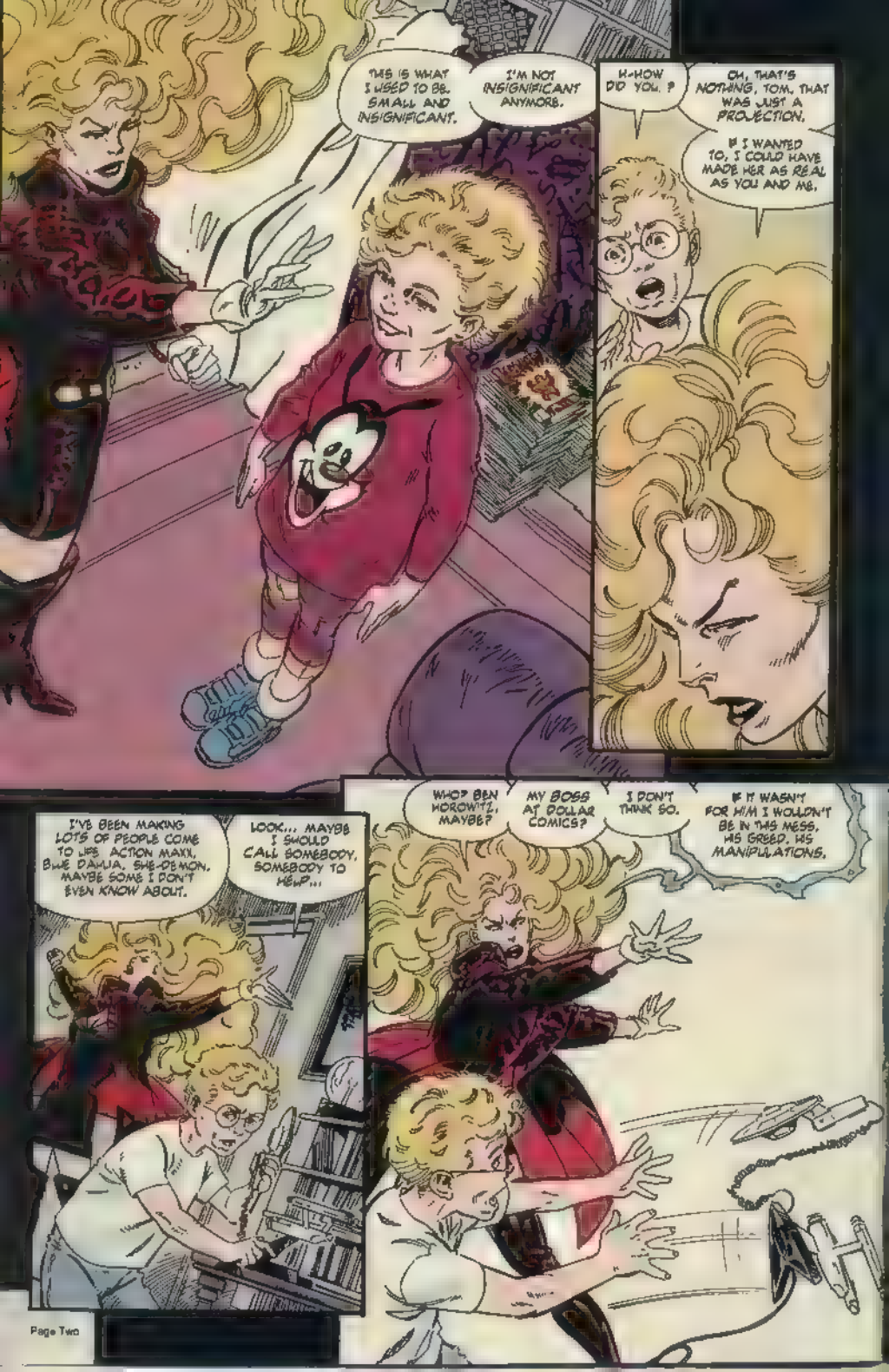
YOU! ON THE ROOF!
STAND STILL AND PUT YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR HEADS!
THERE'S NO WAY OUT...
NO... THERE MIGHT BE... ONE.
HANG ON TO ME, YOU TWO.
THIS MIGHT NOT WORK...
...BUT THEN AGAIN, IT JUST MIGHT!

JUMP!
THAT WAS... INCREDIBLE!
SAVE THE COMPLIMENTS UNTIL WE'RE WELL AWAY FROM HERE, DANNY.
BACK THE OTHER WAY. THE STREET IS FULL OF POLICE.
NYPD
WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO, NATHAN?
OUR TRAINING IN THE GREENERY NEVER COVERED ANYTHING LIKE THIS!
NO. BUT I'M ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT SANDY IS OUR ONLY SURE LEAD. IF WE CAN FIND HER...

"...WE MAY HAVE A CHANCE OF GETTING OUT OF THIS MESS ALIVE!"
ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! I'M COMING!
WHAT DO YOU. ?
WELL... HELLOOOO, NURSE!
PUT YOUR TONGUE BACK IN YOUR HEAD, TOM. IT'S ME.
SANDY. ?
WHERE. ?
RIGHT HERE, BIG BROTHER. I'M SANDY.
AND I THINK I'M IN BIG, BIG TROUBLE...

To Be Continued...

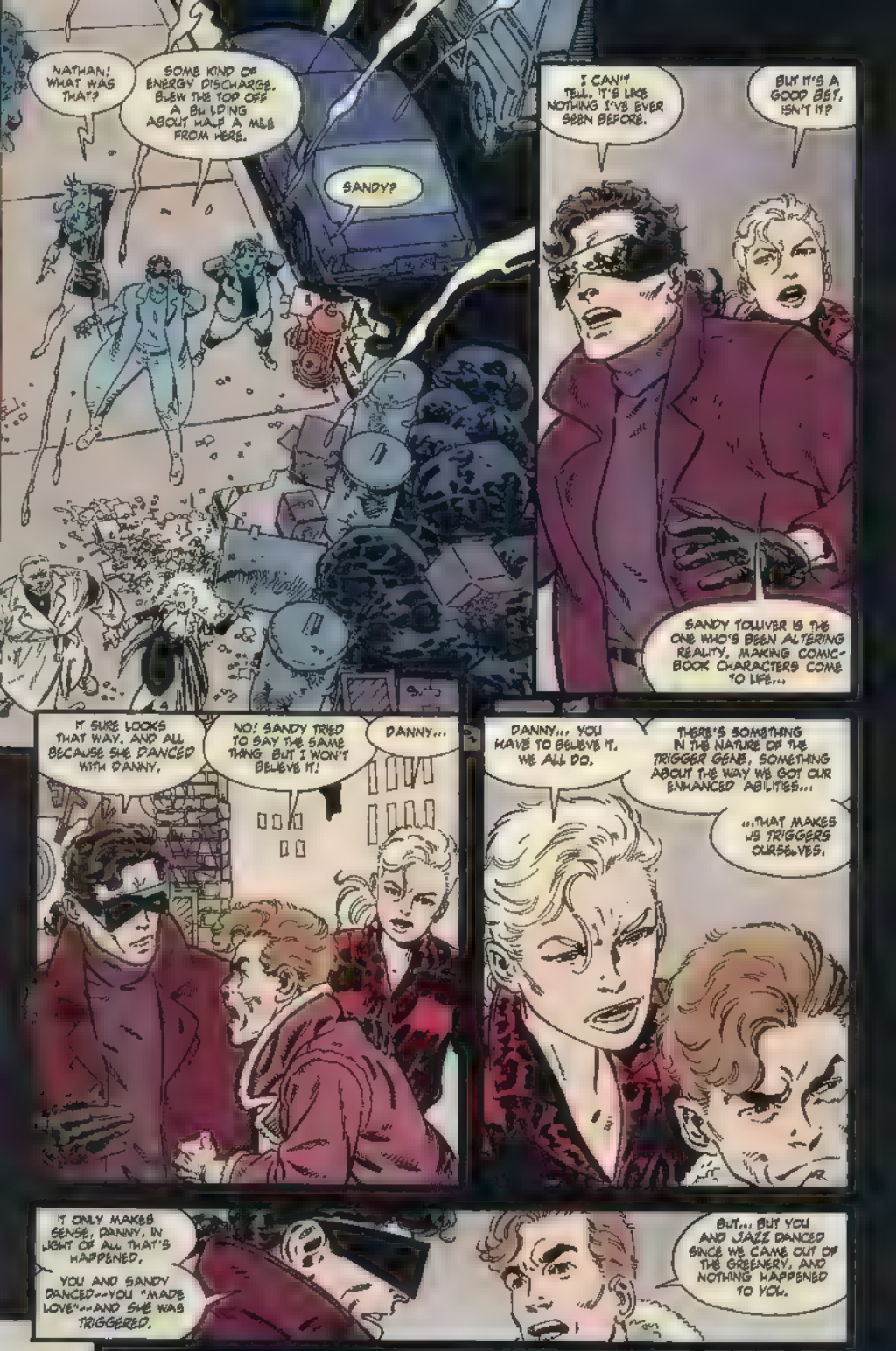
Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me
Stephen Collins Foster
1826 - 1864
S-SANDY ?
I DON'T THINK SO.
NOT ANYMORE, TOM.
WHAT... WHAT KIND OF GAME IS THIS? YOU SOUND JUST LIKE MY SISTER...
...BUT I DON'T LOOK LIKE HER. I DON'T REALLY THINK LIKE HER.
Coke

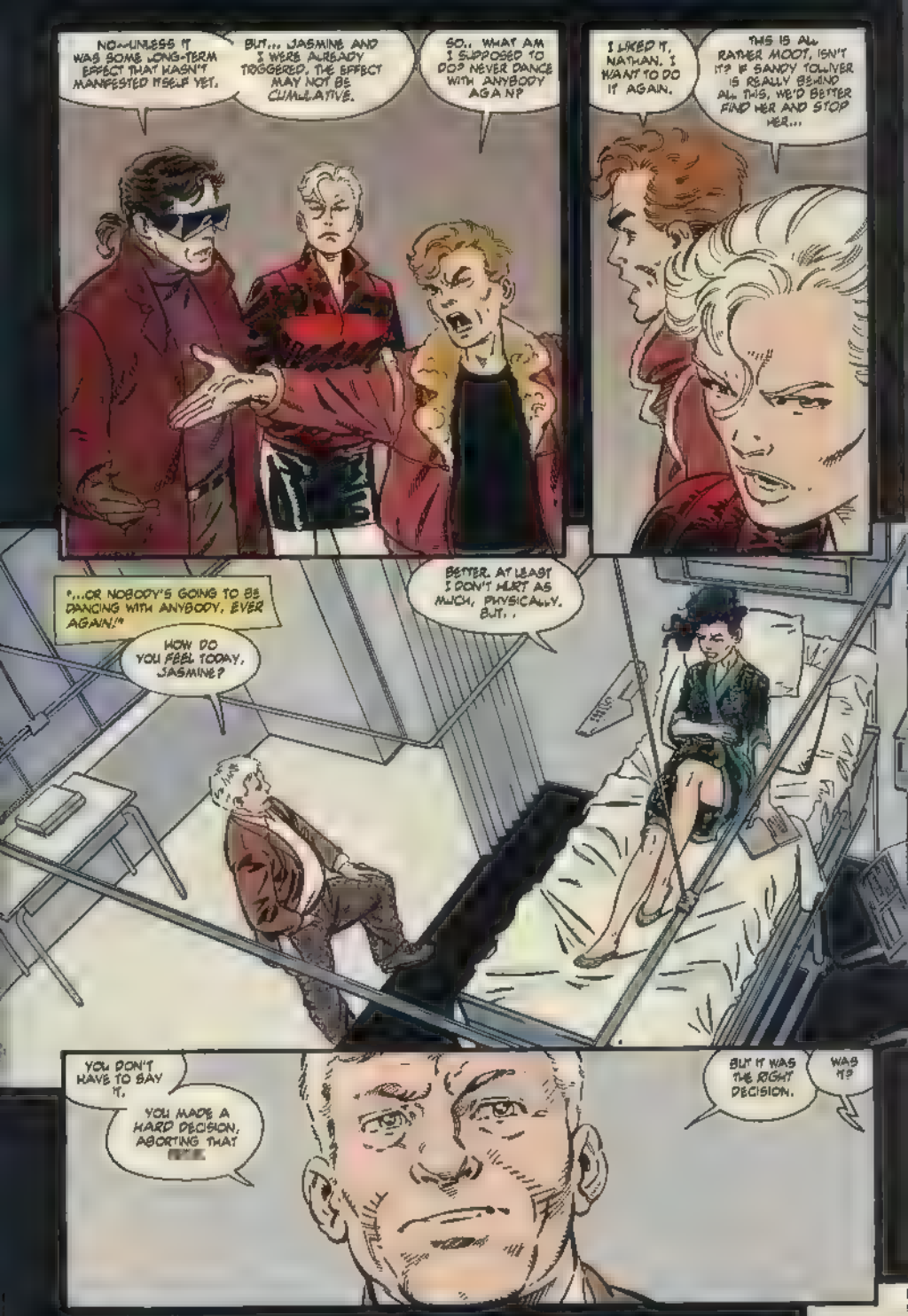

THIS IS WHAT I USED TO BE. SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT.
I'M NOT INSIGNIFICANT ANYMORE.
H-HOW DID YOU...?
OH, THAT'S NOTHING, TOM. THAT WAS JUST A PROJECTION.
IF I WANTED TO, I COULD HAVE MADE HER AS REAL AS YOU AND ME.
WHO? BEN HOROWITZ, MAYBE?
MY BOSS AT DOLLAR COMICS?
I DON'T THINK SO.
IF IT WASN'T FOR HIM I WOULDN'T BE IN THIS MESS. HIS GREED. HIS MANIPULATIONS.
I'VE BEEN MAKING LOTS OF PEOPLE COME TO LIFE. ACTION MAXX, BLUE DAHLIA, SHE-DEMON. MAYBE SOME I DON'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT.
LOOK... MAYBE I SHOULD CALL SOMEBODY. SOMEBODY TO HELP...

I'VE FIGURED IT OUT, YOU SEE. HE KNEW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF HE LEFT DANNY AND ME TOGETHER.
HE KNEW I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO RESIST SUCH A SWEET, INNOCENT KID.
A VIRGIN.
SANDY--IF YOU REALLY ARE SANDY--
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.
POWER, TOM.
I'M TALKING ABOUT POWER.
POWER LIKE THE NEXT MEN HAVE.
POWER LIKE BEN HOROWITZ WANTED FOR HIMSELF, FOR DOLLAR.
BUT HE COULDN'T CLAIM THE NEXT MEN. USE THEM, YES. MANIPULATE THEM, SURE.
BUT NOT OWN THEM. FOR THAT HE NEEDED SOMEONE CLOSER, SOMEONE HE MAYBE THOUGHT OWED HIM...

WHERE THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?
I... I...
YOU WERE GOING TO CALL THE TV PEOPLE, WEREN'T YOU?
OR THE NEWSPAPERS, OR DC OR MARVEL.
YOU WERE GOING TO TRY TO EXPLOIT ME! LIKE HOROWITZ TRIED TO EXPLOIT THE NEXT MEN!
MY OWN BROTHER!!

BUT I WON'T ALLOW IT. I WON'T ALLOW ANYONE TO EXPLOIT ME.
BEFORE I LET ANYTHING LIKE THAT HAPPEN...
*. .I'LL BLOW UP THE WHOLE GODDAM WORLD!!"


NATHAN! WHAT WAS THAT?
SOME KIND OF ENERGY DISCHARGE. BLEW THE TOP OFF A BUILDING ABOUT HALF A MILE FROM HERE.
SANDY?
I CAN'T TELL. IT'S LIKE NOTHING I'VE EVER SEEN BEFORE.
BUT IT'S A GOOD BET, ISN'T IT?
SANDY TOLLIVER IS THE ONE WHO'S BEEN ALTERING REALITY, MAKING COMIC-BOOK CHARACTERS COME TO LIFE...
IT SURE LOOKS THAT WAY, AND ALL BECAUSE SHE DANCED WITH DANNY.
NO! SANDY TRIED TO SAY THE SAME THING BUT I WON'T BELIEVE IT!
DANNY...
DANNY... YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE IT. WE ALL DO.
THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE NATURE OF THE TRIGGER GENE, SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY WE GOT OUR ENHANCED ABILITIES...
...THAT MAKES US TRIGGERS OURSELVES.
IT ONLY MAKES SENSE, DANNY, IN LIGHT OF ALL THAT'S HAPPENED.
YOU AND SANDY DANCED--YOU "MADE LOVE"--AND SHE WAS TRIGGERED.
BUT... BUT YOU AND JAZZ DANCED SINCE WE CAME OUT OF THE GREENERY, AND NOTHING HAPPENED TO YOU.


NO—UNLESS IT WAS SOME LONG-TERM EFFECT THAT HASN'T MANIFESTED ITSELF YET.
BUT... JASMINE AND I WERE ALREADY TRIGGERED. THE EFFECT MAY NOT BE CUMULATIVE.
SO.. WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? NEVER DANCE WITH ANYBODY AGAIN?
I LIKED IT, NATHAN. I WANT TO DO IT AGAIN.
THIS IS ALL RATHER MOOT, ISN'T IT? IF SANDY TOLIVER IS REALLY BEHIND ALL THIS, WE'D BETTER FIND HER AND STOP HER...
"...OR NOBODY'S GOING TO BE DANCING WITH ANYBODY, EVER AGAIN!"
HOW DO YOU FEEL TODAY, JASMINE?
BETTER. AT LEAST I DON'T HURT AS MUCH, PHYSICALLY. BUT. .
YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY IT.
YOU MADE A HARD DECISION, ABORTING THAT
BUT IT WAS THE RIGHT DECISION.
WAS IT?

TONY! WHAT'S WRONG?
WRONG? OH, NOT MUCH, JASMINE.
I JUST LEARNED EVERYTHING I'VE BELIEVED IN FOR THE LAST TWENTY YEARS WAS A LIE.
WHUH!
THAT'S RIGHT, ISN'T IT, WILLIS? OR WOULD YOU RATHER I USED YOUR PROPER TITLE?
CONTROL. I NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD JUST HOW MUCH THAT NAME MEANT.
TONY...
NO. DON'T SAY SO MUCH AS A GOD DAMN WORD.
JASMINE, GET DRESSED. YOU AND I ARE LEAVING.
LEAVING ? WHERE ?
DON'T ASK QUESTIONS. I ORDER YOU TO GET DRESSED!

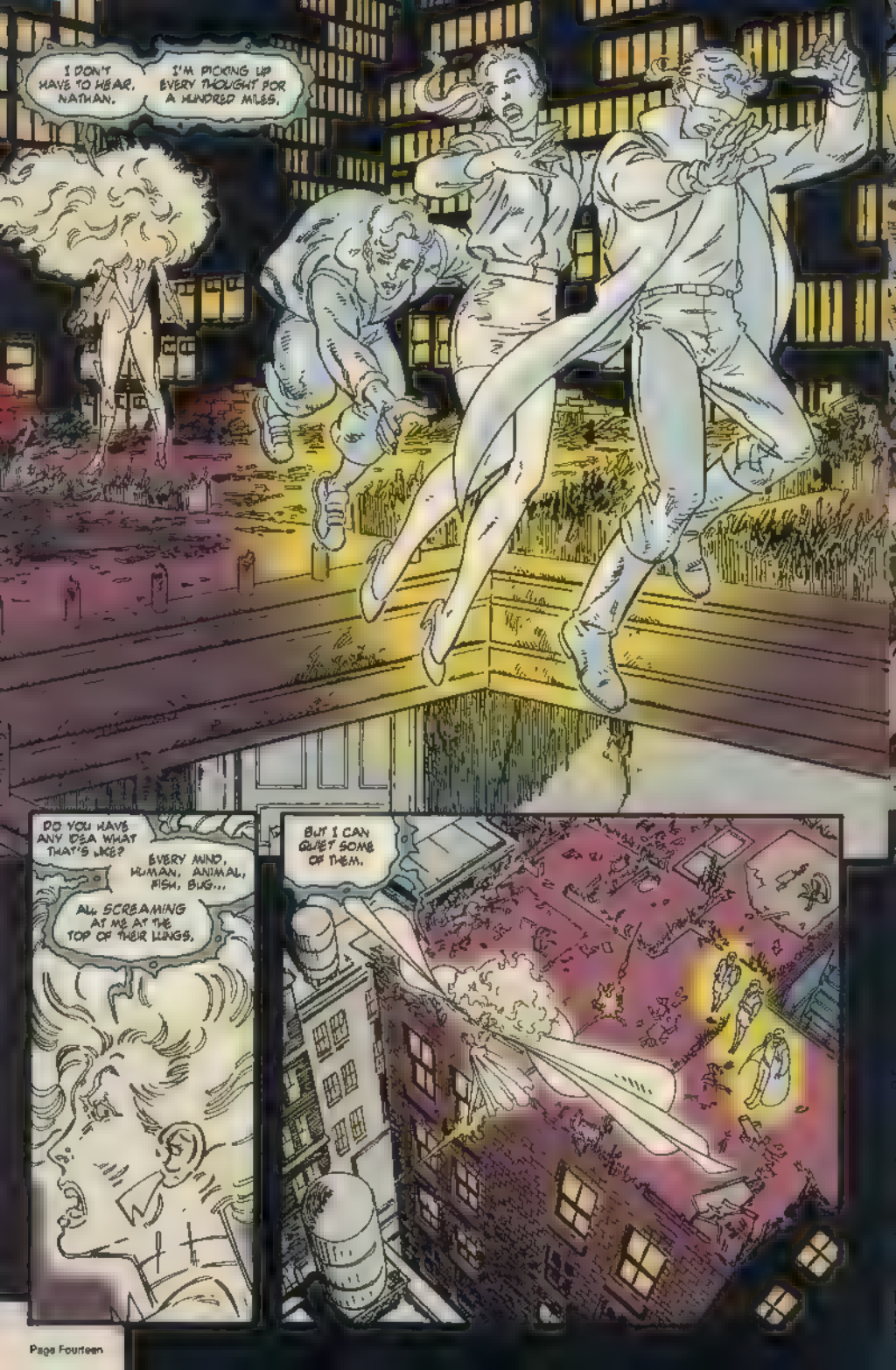
AND WHILE YOU DO THAT, I'LL JUST MAKE SURE MY OLD FRIEND HERE DOESN'T CAUSE US ANY MORE TROUBLE.
THIS MAY COME AS SOMETHING OF A SHOCK TO YOU, DUCUMMEN, SINCE YOU DON'T SEEM TO HAVE A SHRED OF REAL HUMAN FEELING IN YOU...
...BUT I'M GENUINELY SORRY IT HAS TO END LIKE THIS. YOU FOUND ME IN A BAD PLACE AND YOU SHOWED ME THE WAY OUT.
THAT'S THE ONLY REASON I'M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU.
OKAY, YOUNG LADY--MARCH.
DON'T LOOK RIGHT OR LEFT UNTIL WE'RE OUT OF HERE.

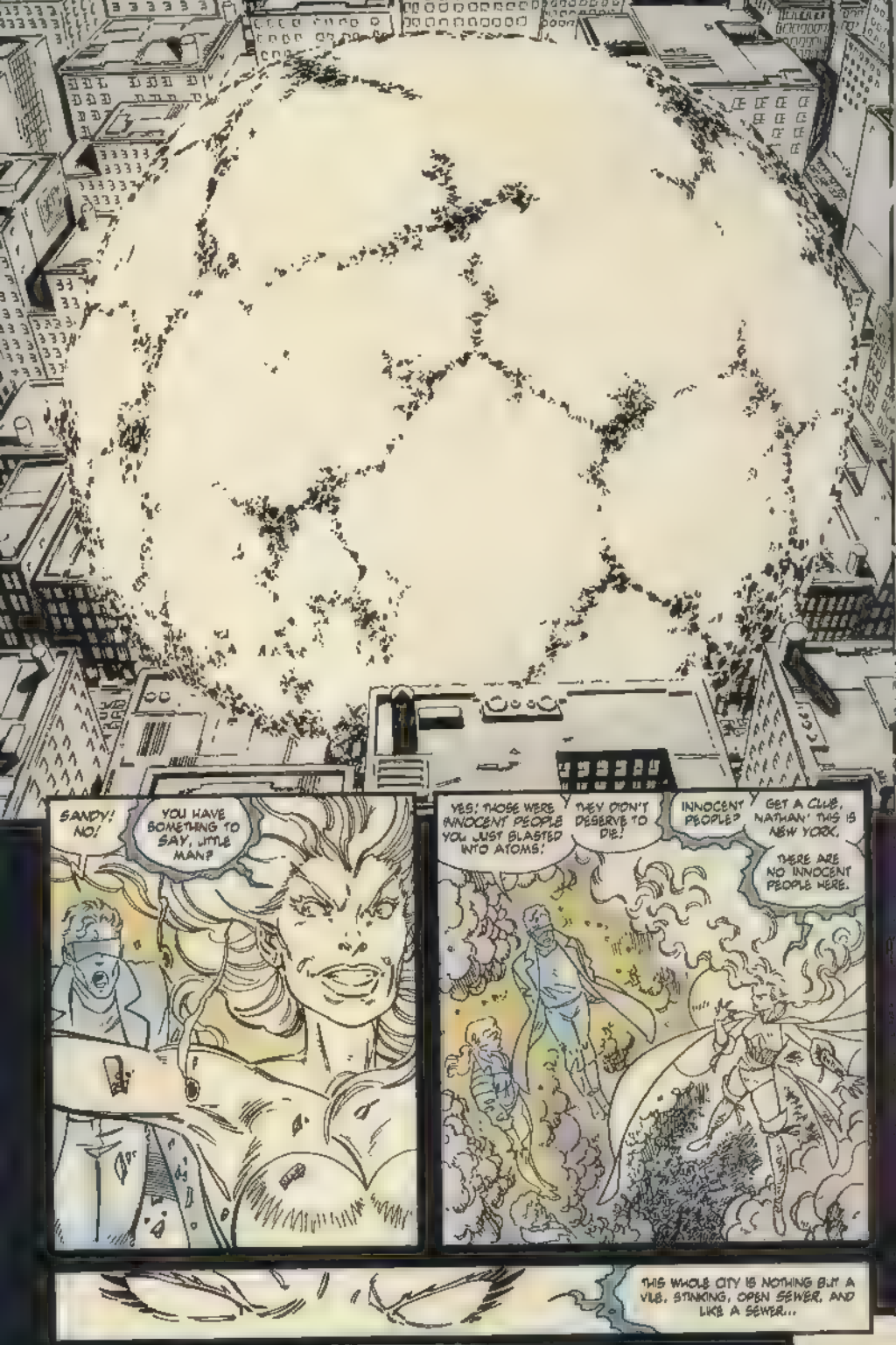
"IF WE ACTUALLY MAKE IT OUT OF HERE..."
IT'S HARD FOR ME TO TELL WITH ALL THAT ENERGY BEING UNLEASHED ALL AROUND HER, BUT I THINK SHE'S JUST... STANDING THERE.
...HELP...
IT'S HER. SHE'S CHANGED EVEN MORE THAN SHE WAS AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE.
WHAT'S SHE DOING?
WHO ?
...TOLLIVER... TOM TOLLIVER. THAT'S... MY SISTER UP THERE...
...AT LEAST... THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID...
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, MR. TOLLIVER? DID SANDY DO THIS?
YES, SHE DID IT. THREW ME... OUT WINDOW. TELEKINESIS.
CRAZY.

"PARANOID."
MS. TOLLIVER? MS. TOLLIVER, ARE YOU IN THERE?
USE THE PASSKEY.
I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD. WE DON'T KNOW THERE'S ANYTHING WRONG IN THERE...
AND THE POLICE WOULD COME ASKING ABOUT SANDY TOLLIVER IF THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG?
WHERE'S SHE BEEN ALL THESE WEEKS? WHAT'S WITH THAT FANCY-SCHMANCY UPTOWN ADDRESS SHE'S ALL OF A SUDDEN LIVING AT?
SHE'S GOT HERSELF MIXED UP IN SOMETHING, I TELL YOU. DRUGS OR SOMETHING.
HER WHOLE APARTMENT COULD BE FULL OF CRACK COCAINE AND GOD KNOWS WHAT.
HERE. GIVE ME THE KEY.
IF YOU'RE NOT MAN ENOUGH TO OPEN THE DOOR, I'LL...
OH MY LORD...!

...MARK ?
RIGHT HERE, AMANDA. HOW DO YOU FEEL?
I'VE BEEN BETTER. HOW ABOUT YOU?
FINE. AS YOU WELL KNOW, MY ANDROID BODY IS VERY NEARLY INDESTRUCTIBLE.
I CARRIED YOU ABOUT FIFTEEN MILES FROM THE HELICOPTER CRASH SITE, SO I THINK WE'LL BE SAFE FOR A WHILE.
VERY HANDY, FINDING THIS CABIN WITH ALL THE SUPPLIES LAID IN. SORT OF LIKE WE WERE EXPECTED.
DO YOU REALLY THINK SO? PERHAPS IT IS NOT AS SAFE AS I'D THOUGHT.
NO, NO. I'M PRETTY SURE WE'LL BE OKAY. AFTER ALL....
WE'VE BEEN OKAY SO FAR, HAVEN'T WE?
THAT SOUP SMELLS GOOD, BY THE WAY.

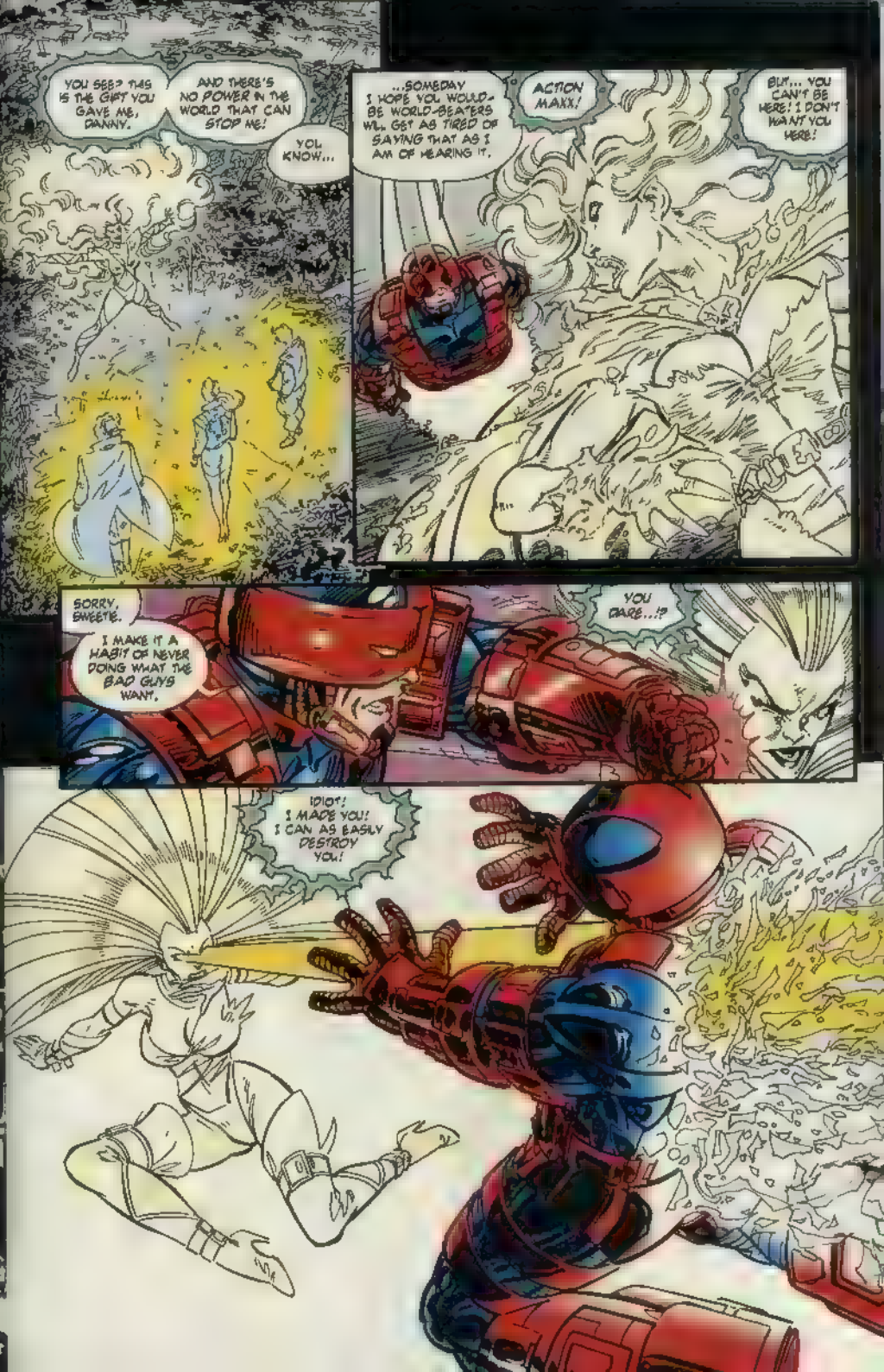
TRY SOME. ONLY CANNED CHICKEN NOODLE, BUT I BELIEVE SUCH BROTH IS OFTEN PRESCRIBED FOR ITS HEALTHFUL QUALITIES.
MM. MY MOTHER SWEARS BY IT.
NOT BAD. MY COMPLIMENTS TO YOU AND THE CAMPBELL KIDS. BUT.. WE REALLY NEED SOME KIND OF PLAN NOW, DON'T WE?
I'VE BEEN RUNNING ROUND LIKE A CHICKEN WITH ITS HEAD CUT OFF SINCE I BUMPED INTO YOU--LITERALLY.
A PLAN?
YES, SO FAR AS WE KNOW THE SECRET SERVICE IS STILL LOOKING FOR ME. AT LEAST, WE'VE NO REASON TO ASSUME THEY'VE ALL OF A SUDDEN DECIDED I'M NOT A SPY OR WHATEVER BULLSHIT HILTOP TOLD THEM.
AND, TO MAKE MATTERS EVEN MORE INTERESTING, WE'VE GOT CORNELIUS VAN DAMME'S MERRY MEN SCOURING THESE WOODS LOOKING FOR ANY TRACE OF THEE AND ME.
YES. IT WOULD SEEM A SITUATION WHICH PRESENTS NO COMFORTABLE SOLUTION.
WELL, ONE, MAYBE. I HAVE NO IDEA HOW WE CAN PULL IT OFF, BUT I THINK OUR BEST WAY OUT OF THIS MESS...
"...IS TO DO JUST WHAT VAN DAMME HAD PLANNED.."
CAREFUL NOW. IF SHE HEARS...


I DON'T HAVE TO HEAR, NATHAN.
I'M PICKING UP EVERY THOUGHT FOR A HUNDRED MILES.
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THAT'S LIKE?
EVERY MIND, HUMAN, ANIMAL, FISH, BUG...
ALL SCREAMING AT ME AT THE TOP OF THEIR LUNGS.
BUT I CAN QUIET SOME OF THEM.


SANDY! NO!
YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY, LITTLE MAN?
YES! THOSE WERE INNOCENT PEOPLE YOU JUST BLASTED INTO ATOMS!
THEY DIDN'T DESERVE TO DIE!
INNOCENT PEOPLE?
GET A CLUE, NATHAN! THIS IS NEW YORK.
THERE ARE NO INNOCENT PEOPLE HERE.
THIS WHOLE CITY IS NOTHING BUT A VILE, STINKING, OPEN SEWER, AND LIKE A SEWER...

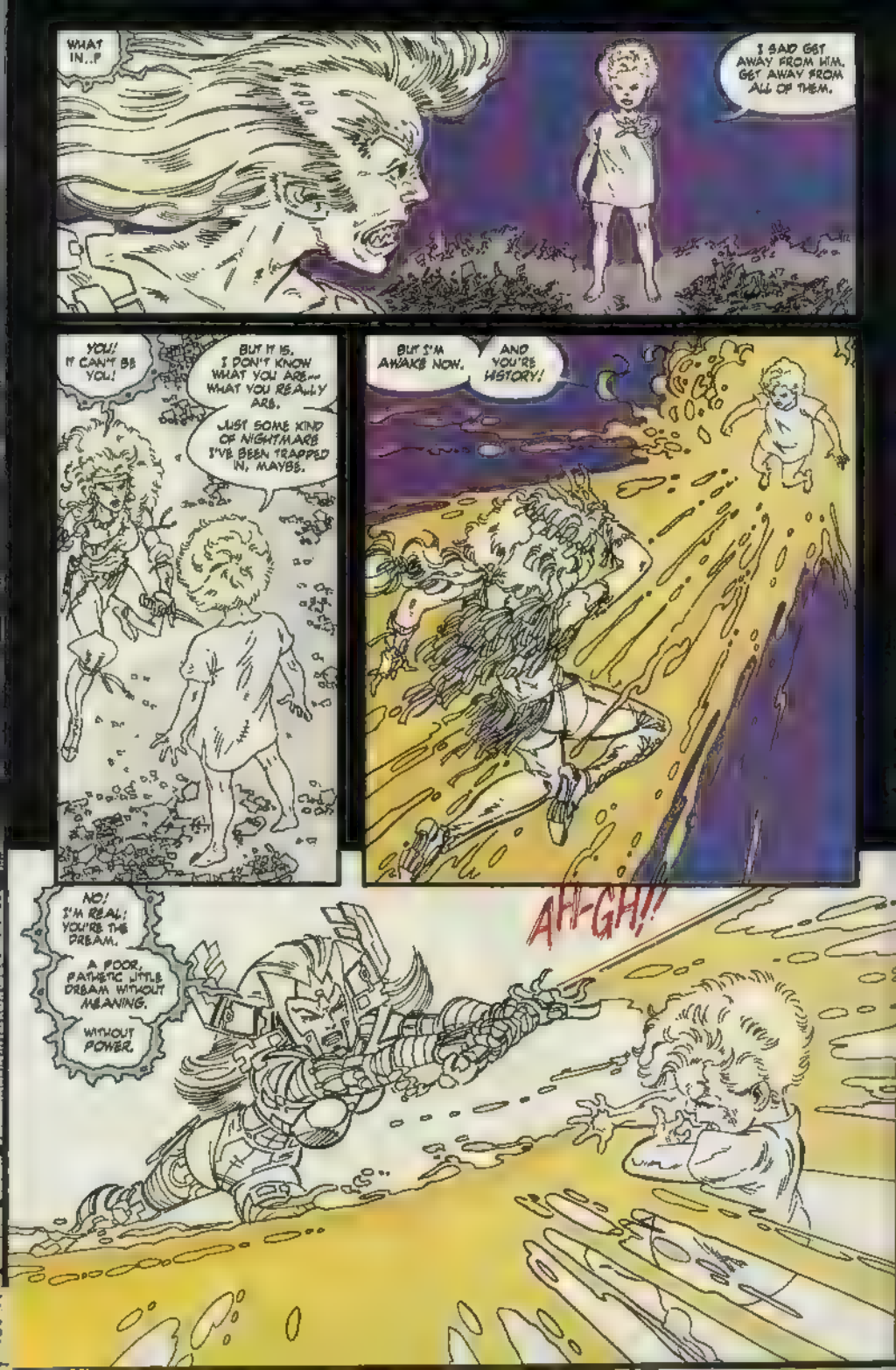
"...IT DESERVES TO BE FLUSHED INTO THE SEA..!"

HER EYES!
LOOK AT HER EYES!
IT'S DUST! SHE'S BEEN LYING HERE WITH HER EYES WIDE OPEN AND... AND DUST HAS SETTLED ALL OVER HER.
BUT SHE'S NOT DEAD?
NO, THERE'S A PULSE. QUITE STRONG.
BUT IF SHE'S BEEN LYING HERE LIKE THIS... FOR WEEKS IT WOULD HAVE TO BE...


YOU SEE? THIS IS THE GIFT YOU GAVE ME, DANNY.
AND THERE'S NO POWER IN THE WORLD THAT CAN STOP ME!
YOU KNOW...
...SOMEDAY I HOPE YOU WOULD-BE WORLD-BEATERS WILL GET AS TIRED OF SAYING THAT AS I AM OF HEARING IT.
ACTION MAXX!
BUT... YOU CAN'T BE HERE! I DON'T WANT YOU HERE!
SORRY, SWEETIE.
I MAKE IT A HABIT OF NEVER DOING WHAT THE BAD GUYS WANT.
YOU DARE...!?
IDIOT! I MADE YOU! I CAN AS EASILY DESTROY YOU!

"I CAN DESTROY EVERYTHING!"
...NO...
NO.
NO.
SANDY! LISTEN TO ME! YOU'VE GOT TO LISTEN TO ME!
OO IS
ONCE UPON A TIME, MAYBE. WHEN I FIRST SAW YOU, I THOUGHT YOU WERE CUTE, IN A STUCK-UP SORT OF WAY.
I WONDERED WHAT A ROLL IN THE HAY MIGHT BE LIKE WITH YOU.
BUT NOW I KNOW, DON'T I?
IT WOULD BE THE SAME AS WITH DANNY.
AND WE DON'T WANT THAT REPEATED...
GN-AH!

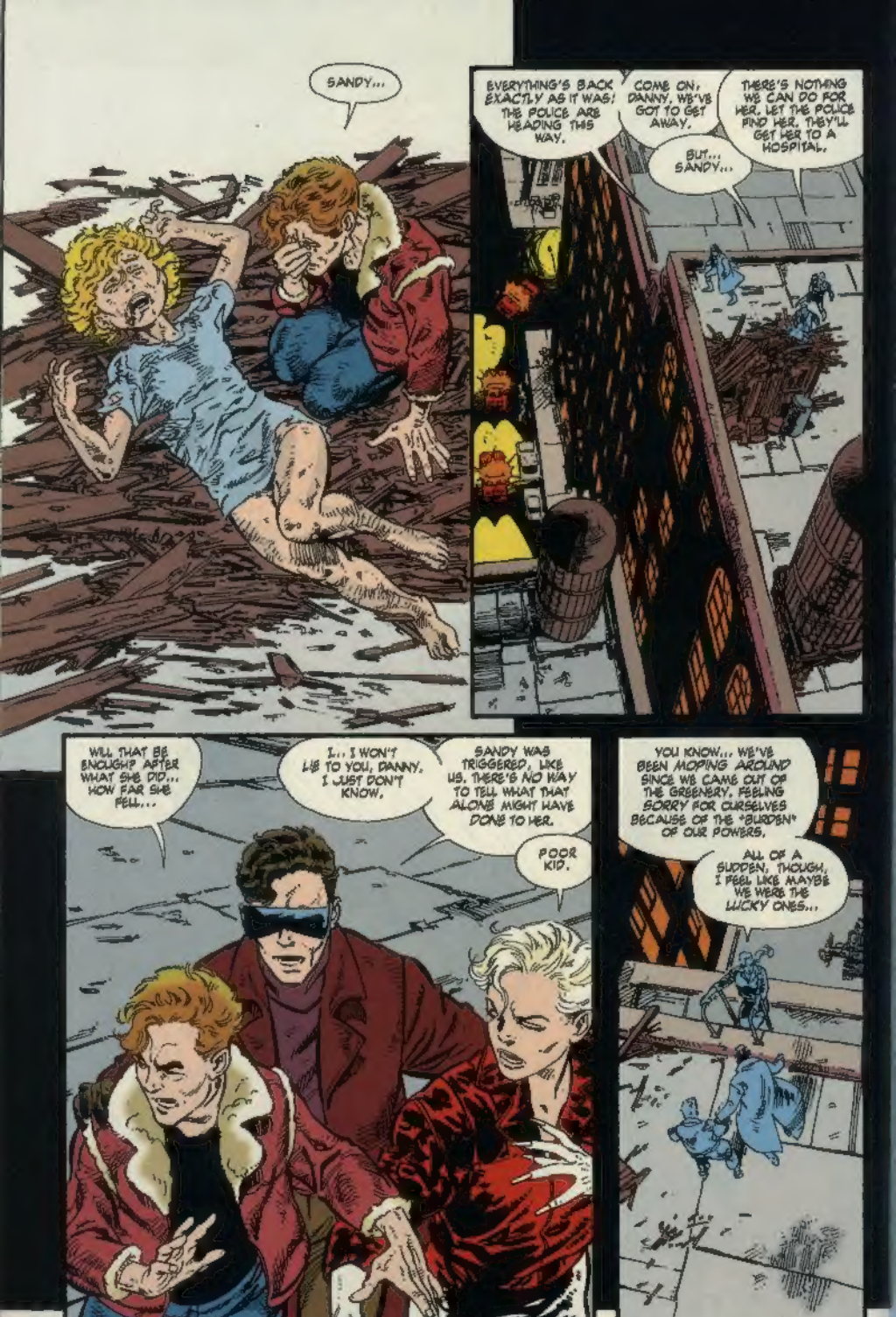
SANDY: STOP!
AND YOU, THE ICE QUEEN. THE VIRGIN QUEEN.
SNUG AND SAFE INSIDE YOUR LITTLE COCOON OF INVULNERABILITY.
UNTIL NOW.
YOU CAN FEEL THAT, CAN'T YOU?
SANDY... PLEASE...
DON'T DO THIS!
SHHH... DON'T SAY ANYTHING THAT MIGHT MAKE ME MAD, DANNY.
I'VE DECIDED I WON'T HURT YOU. NOT YET, ANYWAY. I OWE YOU SOMETHING FOR THIS POWER.
SANDY...
GET AWAY FROM HIM!!


WHAT IN..?
I SAID GET AWAY FROM HIM. GET AWAY FROM ALL OF THEM.
YOU! IT CAN'T BE YOU!
BUT IT IS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE... WHAT YOU REALLY ARE.
JUST SOME KIND OF NIGHTMARE I'VE BEEN TRAPPED IN, MAYBE.
BUT I'M AWAKE NOW.
AND YOU'RE HISTORY!
AH-GH!!
NO! I'M REAL! YOU'RE THE DREAM.
A POOR, PATHETIC LITTLE DREAM WITHOUT MEANING.
WITHOUT POWER.

YOU DO THAT COMIC-BOOK RAP PRETTY GOOD.
BUT, THEN, YOU SHOULD. I'VE READ ENOUGH OF THEM.
AND THAT'S ALL YOU REALLY ARE, SEE.
JUST SOMETHING OUT OF A COMIC BOOK. THE KIND OF COMIC BOOK MAYBE EVERY FAN CARRIES AROUND IN HIS HEAD.
THE ONE WHERE HE'S THE SUPER-HERO AND ALL THE WORLD LOVES HIM.
NO! STOP! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
PUTTING YOU BACK IN YOUR BOX, PANDORA.

YOU'RE ALL THE NASTINESS I'VE HAD BOTTLED UP INSIDE ME FOR YEARS AND YEARS. ALL THE RESENTMENTS AND THE JEALOUSIES, ALL THE SHIT EVERYONE CARRIES.
I LET YOU OUT WITHOUT MEANING TO, WITHOUT KNOWING I WAS EVEN DOING IT.
BUT NOW YOU'RE GONE!

NOW... GOT TO UNDO WHAT YOU...
...WHAT I DID.
GOT TO...
...MAKE IT THE WAY IT WAS...
BANDY!!


SANDY...
EVERYTHING'S BACK EXACTLY AS IT WAS! THE POLICE ARE HEADING THIS WAY.
COME ON, DANNY. WE'VE GOT TO GET AWAY.
BUT... SANDY...
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO FOR HER. LET THE POLICE FIND HER. THEY'LL GET HER TO A HOSPITAL.
WILL THAT BE ENOUGH? AFTER WHAT SHE DID... HOW FAR SHE FELL...
I... I WON'T LIE TO YOU, DANNY. I JUST DON'T KNOW.
SANDY WAS TRIGGERED, LIKE US. THERE'S NO WAY TO TELL WHAT THAT ALONE MIGHT HAVE DONE TO HER.
POOR KID.
YOU KNOW... WE'VE BEEN MOPING AROUND SINCE WE CAME OUT OF THE GREENERY, FEELING SORRY FOR OURSELVES BECAUSE OF THE "BURDEN" OF OUR POWERS.
ALL OF A SUDDEN, THOUGH, I FEEL LIKE MAYBE WE WERE THE LUCKY ONES...

Next issue: The final countdown to the conclusion of everything started with #0! —— Be here in sixty days for **LIES, Part One**